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THE DOUBLE EVENT

A TALE OF THE MELBOURNE CUP

BY

NAT. GOULD

'VERAX'

LONDON

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS, LIMITED

BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL

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Nat Gould, a writer of sporting novels, is probably connected with Australia. He was born at Manchester in 1857. He is a journalist of wide experience and an extensive traveller in the Australian colonies. His work appeared in 1891.

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THE DOUBLE EVENT.

CHAPTER I.

JACK MARSTON.

NOBODY could exactly make out who or what John Marston was—Jack Marston, as he was more familiarly called. Probably had he been asked the question he would have found it a difficult matter to answer it in a satisfactory manner. He was always free with his money, had plenty of ready cash to all appearances, and yet his chief occupation seemed to be endeavouring to kill time. He was a familiar figure at all the principal race meetings, was a member of the best clubs, was freely admitted into good society, and a general favourite, not only with the ladies, but, what was still more strange, with the men.

A handsome, well-dressed man like Jack Marston could hardly fail to be popular with the fair sex. Probably it was the utter absence of all conceit or apparent knowledge of his personal attractions which lent him an additional charm for their society. No man was readier than Marston to impart in the strictest confidence to some fair lady the 'correct tip' for a race, and, what is of still more importance, the information was generally worth something. He danced well, and sang well, and no picnic was considered complete without him.

'We must ask Jack Marston, mamma. He's such good fun, and he's so obliging.'

'So he may be, my dear. But who is Mr. Marston? He certainly looks well-bred, but he's an enigma to me.'

This was generally the style of cross-questioning when the invitations for a picnic, ball, or race party were being sent out. The general result was that Jack Marston was asked, although 'mammas' and 'papas' were rather dubious about encouraging the handsome swain who was a mystery to everybody.

Jack Marston knew exactly the position he stood in with regard to these arrangements. He was proud to think he was asked for 'what he was,' not for 'who he was.' Cynical he would be at times, but not sneering. He could give the 'retort courteous,' and never hint that he was all the time reproving or snubbing the person addressed, although a cute casual observer might have noticed it. To the dowagers shadowing with their presence the young ladies under their charge he was studiously polite; in fact, he paid more attention to them than to the younger members of the party. He was often chaffed about it, but he merely laughed and said that he liked to study human nature in all its varied forms, and that he considered talking with a mature woman of the world far more beneficial to him than prating mere polite nothings to a young lady fresh from school.

It was an open question with the ladies as to whether Jack Marston had ever been in love. He was as free from care as a lark, and did not appear to brood over any dark sorrow in his past life. And yet there were times when a gleam of sadness passed over his face as his eyes glanced upon the form of some fair girl.

'Look at Mr. Marston now,' said pretty Mrs. Mortley one day at a picnic, 'and then dare tell me he has never been in love.'

The remark was occasioned by the lady seeing Jack Marston looking with 'all his soul,' as she put it, at a pretty child of twelve years, decorating her hair with a garland of wild-flowers. When he saw he was observed he coloured slightly and seemed annoyed.

It was an occasional fit of mental abstraction like this which made people think there must be something in Marston's past which had tended to blight his life. This undefined feeling made him the more interesting to his lady

friends, and it was this to a certain extent which made him popular with them.

Men found Jack Marston what they would call a 'jolly good fellow.' He would crack a bottle with them. He would play billiards, hazard, and cards, and gamble heavily, too. He was a daring bettor, and had once or twice given the ring a severe knock. He would lend a friend a hundred to get him out of a scrape, but he must thoroughly understand what the money was for before he handed it over.

One slight incident is characteristic of the man in this respect. A friend of his had been hit heavily over a certain race, and asked Jack Marston to lend him £50 to settle with. Marston, after inquiring the name of the bookmaker the money was owing to, lent the amount required. On settling-day he went up to the layer of odds, and, after a casual remark or two, said :

'By-the-bye, T—— has'—mentioning the name of the friend he had lent the money to—'settled with you?'

'No, Mr. Marston, he has not, and he told me this morning that he could not do so, and asked me to give him time.'

Jack Marston said nothing about the matter, but when, in a fortnight's time, the same friend came to negotiate another loan, he said :

'I suppose you settled with T—— over that last race?'

'Oh yes,' was the reply. 'That was what I wanted the money for.'

'That's a lie,' was the cool answer.

An altercation ensued, but eventually Marston gave his friend a rare piece of advice.

'Never tell me a lie, old fellow. It's the most abominable way out of a difficulty I know. I'll pay the money for you this time, but I shall give it the bookmaker myself.'

Marston did so. The story leaked out, as such things invariably do, and it increased the estimation in which Marston was held a hundredfold. This action was characteristic of the man. He was not to be trifled with, and backers and layers, gentlemen and scoundrels, all knew that whatever Jack Marston might be, he was a 'straight goer.'

This brief sketch of a man who will figure in several

exciting scenes in this story may give the reader a faint idea of what he was like. Who he was he may tell in his own words at some future date, but at present his lips are as a sealed book.

It was a bright, sharp, fresh morning in June when Jack Marston stepped out of a hansom at the door of Tattersall's Club, Pitt Street, Sydney. He had his usual small bunch of violets in the button-hole of his light overcoat, and his whole appearance betokened that he was a desirable man to know, and, what's more, a gentleman. He tossed the cabby half-a-crown, which must have been considerably more than his legal fare, for the man politely touched his hat with 'Thank you, sir. Shall I call later on?'

'No, not this morning, Matthews. I may be here some time.'

'That's the best swell of the whole boiling lot!' was the cabman's remark to one of his mates as he prepared to drive on.

'Say he's been hard hit at the tables lately,' was the reply.

'I'm darned sorry for that. He's a free-handed gent, he is. None of yer "Drive me a quarter-hour for a shilling sort," he ain't.'

Marston had walked into the club, and was conversing with the leviathan bookmaker, Will Kingdon. Their conversation appeared to be interesting, and presently they sat down at a small table near the top end of the room.

'I don't think it can be done, Mr. Marston; but, at any rate, I'll try. You did me a good turn once, sir, and Will Kingdon's not the man to forget that.'

'A mere trifle that, Mr. Kingdon. You'd do more for me, I'll be bound, if I needed it,' said Marston.

'Trifle! Well, I don't consider five thousand pounds much of a trifle, Mr. Marston,' said Kingdon.

The conversation alluded to a very kindly action on the part of Jack Marston, who, being particularly 'flush' at a certain period, lent Kingdon the sum named to settle with. From that day the 'leviathan' had never looked back, and he considered his good fortune was owing to the timely aid he received in the hour of his need.

'It's a big sum to lay against a three-year-old, Mr.

Marston, especially coming out of the best stable in the colony.'

'What price do you think you could get me, Kingdon, asked Jack Marston.

'In a lump sum you say you'd rather have it. Well, for the same horse, Derby and Cup, I don't think more than £1,000 to £20.'

'I'll take £20,000 to £400, if you can lay it, Kingdon, and another £20,000 at the same price if you can get it,' said Marston.

'It's a lot of money, sir. Is it for the stable, might I ask, because if not, sir, I'd advise you not to meddle with it. They run straight as a die, but they won't stand the cream of the market being taken from them,' said Kingdon.

'It's all right on that score, Kingdon. You needn't be uneasy about me. I'm capable of taking care of myself,' said Marston.

'I don't know so much about that,' was the bookmaker's reply.

Marston looked at him quickly—a keen, searching glance. 'What do you mean, Kingdon?' he said.

'Well, sir, I heard you'd lost thousands at hazard lately. If it's true, tell me, Mr. Marston, and I'll see you through.'

'It is true, to a certain extent, Kingdon, but it's all right. I've squared accounts, and shall have to deny myself the fascination of hazard for some time to come.'

'I'm glad of that, sir. The game would ruin a millionaire.'

'Let's change the subject. Will you lay me that wager?' said Marston.

'I'll lay you £20,000 to £400 if it's not gone,' said Kingdon, as he pulled out his book.

'Put it down. Caloola's the horse for the Melbourne Derby and Cup,' said Marston, as he wrote the big wager down in a neat little pocket-book.

When Kingdon heard the name he looked up in surprise. Pulling a card out of his book he glanced quickly down the list of names for the Derby and Cup. Yes, there it was, Caloola, by Chester—Maid Marian, in the V.R.C. Derby; and Caloola, 6 st. 8 lb., in the Melbourne Cup.

'Sure you've not made a mistake, sir?' he said; 'I've never heard the name mentioned yet.'

'No mistake whatever. Book the bet, and get a little for yourself if you can. I shall be quite contented with another wager like this at the same price,' said Marston as he closed his book.

Kingdon sat a few minutes pondering over the wager he had just laid, and then went down the room. He spoke to one or two of the heaviest layers of odds, and, much to his surprise, found they had laid Caloola that morning for considerable amounts. However, after sundry inquiries, he obtained about £10,000 more at the odds he had laid himself. He had by this time modified his opinion about Caloola, and thought Jack Marston must have been working a little commission. Little did Kingdon know the influence that wager would have upon his future career, and that of the man who had taken it.

Jack Marston, walking down Pitt Street, looked calm and cool, as though backing horses to win thousands of pounds was an everyday occurrence with him. It was this *sang-froid* which always gave Marston an advantage over other men, and even made the ladies more partial to him. Many a fair head bowed to him from the carriages as they wheeled past up the street. He had a smile and a courteous salute for all, but it was quite evident his thoughts were elsewhere. So lost was he in meditation that he had almost reached Circular Quay before he appeared to realize where he was. Looking at his watch he saw it was past noon, and after a moment's reflection he went on to the Quay, and took the direction of the Orient wharf. The *Liguria* was leaving for England, and he watched the stately vessel gently glide from the wharf, and, amidst the cheers of people on shore, and the answering echoes from those on board, steam steadily down the harbour.

'Homeward bound,' he muttered to himself; 'I wonder when it will be my turn. By Heavens, Fred, you little know the price I've paid to shield you; and the dear old mother too. Thank God, she will never know.' And as he thought of the stately lady who had watched over him in his early boyhood, and had caressed him as only a mother can a favourite son, the tears started to Jack Marston's eyes. Hardened as he was to the world's opinion, utterly indifferent as he might be to what people generally thought

of him, he had one tender spot in his heart, and that was for the mother who had loved him so dearly. But this slight fit of depression, 'the blues' he called it, did not last long.

In a moment the shadow had passed from his face, and he was cool, calculating Jack Marston once more. But there was a sense of desolation at his heart. Jack Marston, the favourite of the ladies, the best of good fellows with the men, the pet of the ring, the most daring plunger on the Australian turf, the most reckless card-player of them all; a crack shot, a fearless rider, a man with a multitude of friends, was as utterly alone and despairing almost as any shipwrecked sailor on a desert island. If my readers will take the trouble to follow his career they may find it not uninteresting. Before the mystery of Jack Marston's life is unravelled we shall have to travel in far-off lands. Sometimes he will be with us; at other times we shall be working out his fate unknown to him. At present Jack Marston is going 'with the tide.' There is a constant ebb and flow in all our lives. No men go more readily 'with the tide' than those who follow that most fascinating of pursuits, the Turf. We all have our 'ups and downs' in life. Saints or sinners, we must all go with the tide at some time of our lives. Where it will lead us to we know not. As Jack Marston stands on Circular Quay, Sydney, his destiny is being worked out thousands of miles away. Patience, reader, and you shall see where the tide will take him.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCENE IS CHANGED.

THE Draytons, of Drayton Hall, Derbyshire, were one of the oldest families in the midland counties of England. Squire Drayton's pedigree could be traced back for centuries, and 'blue blood' ran in his veins. He was not a nobleman, not even a plain baronet, and he rejoiced in the fact. He came of a good old stock of landed proprietors, and his wealth would have put many an impecunious younger son of a duke in comparative affluence. Coal mines in Stafford-

shire yielded him untold, not gold, but coal, which was commercially converted into the precious metal, although it always ended in smoke. The Drayton mines were famed throughout the land, and perhaps this was one reason why the name became familiar as 'household words,' or a 'Derby winner,' with the public. Squire Drayton had two sons and one daughter. Frederick, the elder one—the heir to his great wealth—was the one source of uneasiness in the Squire's happy, prosperous life. Naturally, he expected his eldest son to assume a position in the county, and it was the height of his ambition that he should go into Parliament. But Frederick Drayton, or, more correctly speaking, Captain Drayton—for he was an officer in the Guards—had no desire to bury himself in the county, as he called it. London, with its myriad attractions, had more charm for him. His life was one long vortex of pleasure. The Household Regiments seldom left the metropolis, and there was very little danger of their being called out for active service in the 'piping times of peace' the country was enjoying.

The Captain's intimate acquaintances said that his chief occupation was getting into debt, gambling heavily, and flirting with sundry dainty sirens.

He was a lively man, but not a man to make many real friends. Somewhat unscrupulous, so it was said, and although his father made him a handsome allowance, it was never sufficient for his numerous wants. His brother officers fought rather shy of Captain Drayton. He had given them ample proof of his acuteness when he won the Regimental Cup with Rioter, a dark horse he had specially reserved to discomfort them. At cards, Captain Drayton seemed to have the 'devil's own luck'—at least, that was the opinion of the young pigeons he had no hesitation in plucking. Where his money went to was a mystery. True, there was a little villa at St. John's Wood, and a pretty bird inside it that must have cost him a small fortune. But his gambling wins would have been enough for that. There was a leakage somewhere, and a big one, and it took all the Captain's spare cash to fill the gap.

Squire Drayton had offered special inducement to his son to settle down at Drayton Hall, but nothing could persuade him to do so. 'One might think you were

haunted by a ghost,' said the Squire to him, 'You appear to have a perfect horror of the old place. D—— it, sir, it's been good enough for our family for generations, what have you to say against it?'

'Oh, nothing,' nonchalantly answered his dutiful son. 'I hate being bored in the country. I couldn't live here without selling out, and I don't feel disposed to do that yet.'

The old Squire sighed as he said, 'Oh, Fred, I don't think Jack would have said that. Your brother loved the old home. I wonder where he went to, and what the deuce made him leave us. Sometimes, Fred, I fancy he's dead. It was all so sudden.'

If there was one topic of conversation more than another Captain Drayton hated, it was a chat alone with the Squire about his brother. His usual answer was, 'How the deuce should I know where Jack is, or what has become of him? The hue and cry was raised all over the place when he disappeared. You know the reason he went as well as I do, governor.'

'I'll never believe it, Fred. Whoever wronged Nellie St. Clair, it was not your brother Jack. Why, man, he loved her more than his own life.'

In order the better to make the reader acquainted with the full importance of this conversation, it may be necessary to give a brief account of the mysterious disappearance of John Drayton, the Squire's youngest son, and also of Nellie St. Clair, the only daughter of Sir William St. Clair, of the Doveholes, whose estates joined those of Squire Drayton. Shortly before Christmas, five years before this story commences, the silent neighbourhood of Drayton was thrown into a state of consternation by the sudden and unaccountable disappearance of Master Jack, as the old servants had christened him, and the neighbours had followed suit, and Nellie St. Clair. It had been the ardent wish of Squire Drayton to see his son John married to Nellie St. Clair. She was the daughter of a baronet, but her fortune would not be large. Still, the Squire had ample means, and he was quite ready to settle a good income on them, immediately they were married. Sir William was nothing loath to foster the alliance, and it really seemed as though John

Drayton and Nellie St. Clair had made up their minds on the subject. This match did not please one person, and that was Captain Drayton. He was fond of Nellie St. Clair in his own indolent selfish way, and considered that as he was the heir he ought to have a prior claim to her. It was a habit of the Captain to consider all persons and things as mere means for gratifying his indulgences. The courtship went on rapidly, and to all appearances satisfactorily. John Drayton proposed, and was duly accepted, although with more hesitation on the part of Miss St. Clair than might have been expected. Captain Drayton was almost as constant a visitor to Sir William's house as his brother, and naturally he saw a good deal of Miss St. Clair. It was a fortnight before the marriage was to have taken place that the sensation caused at Drayton occurred. The whole country rang with it. 'Mysterious disappearance of an intended bride and bridegroom,' was the heading in the *Advertiser;* 'The Drayton Mystery,' and sundry other startling items of intelligence were published. The Squire and Sir William were very reticent in regard to the matter, but the fact was they knew as little about the affair as anyone. Nothing was discovered until a year after the occurrence, when Nellie St. Clair suddenly and without warning returned to her home, and a few weeks after her arrival there she died, the doctor said of a broken heart. She refused to say who it was she had gone away with, but solemnly declared it was not Jack Drayton. Her persistent denial only made Sir William more confident that Jack Drayton was the scoundrel who had lured his daughter from her home, and then basely deserted her.

Squire Drayton refused to believe this. He knew his younger son well, and felt he would never be capable of such a mean, cruel, dastardly act. He quarrelled bitterly with Sir William over the matter, and although four years had passed since the death of Miss St. Clair, they were not reconciled yet, merely exchanging ordinary courtesies in a frigid manner.

Captain Drayton was one of the loudest in denunciation of his brother's conduct. He considered it a disgrace to the family that such a stigma should be put upon their honourable name. He tried hard to convince the Squire

and his mother that his brother was a scoundrel, but in this he failed. His sister, Rose Drayton, also took up the cudgels on behalf of the missing Jack, and consequently the Captain found Drayton Hall at times anything but pleasant quarters. The Squire and his wife lived in hopes of Jack's return. Although not their eldest son, he was, as is often the case, the favourite. The lad had always been addicted to hunting pursuits, and bid fair to make a real foxhunting-squire like his father.

Many long conversations had the Squire and his wife together on the subject, but no satisfactory solution of the mystery could they arrive at. It was the Squire's belief his son was dead, but Mrs. Drayton's mother's heart told her it was not so.

'He's a much-wronged boy. There's something at the bottom of it all that we know nothing of, Hal,' she would say. The Squire's name was Harold. 'He'll come back to us some day, my poor lad, and clear his name. Depend upon it, Hal, he has some good reason for keeping away. My opinion is he is doing it to shield someone else.'

Talk as they might they could get no nearer the truth, and after this lapse of five years the 'mysterious disappearance' was thought of no more in the neighbourhood, and the general opinion was that John Drayton was dead—murdered, some went so far as to say.

There was one man at Squire Drayton's who had a firm belief in the innocence of 'Master Jack,' and that was Thurton, the stud-groom and head man over Squire Drayton's stables.

The Squire owned several good racehorses, and his hunters could not be beaten in the shires. Master Jack had inherited all his father's love for good horses, and was considered a reliable judge.

'The man who can get the best of Master Jack in a matter of horseflesh will have to get up very early in the morning,' was the stud-groom's remark when bestowing praise upon his favourite.

Naturally Jack Drayton became on very familiar terms with Ike Thurton, and he had quite as much to do with the management of the horses as the stud-groom.

When Jack disappeared, the only man about the place, or

even in the neighbourhood, who evinced but little surprise, was the impenetrable Ike. To try and pump Ike Thurton was much the same as endeavouring to get milk from the 'iron cow,' or have a little conversation with an Egyptian mummy. He seldom spoke until he was spoken to, and then he always deliberated a few seconds before he answered. He had a very desirable habit in a stud-groom, and not alone is it desirable in a stud-groom, but in all men connected with racing establishments—he knew how to hold his tongue.

So when Jack Drayton was missing all people inquired of Ike Thurton what he thought about it. He merely shook his head, and muttered something about its being none of his business.

The Squire took no notice of Ike's taciturnity, for he knew the man's ways and approved of them. What did surprise him was that Ike did not appear overwhelmed with grief at the loss of his favourite. He asked Thurton once what he thought had become of the missing man, but that worthy held up his hands in wonder, and exclaimed how the deuce should he know.

The Squire was satisfied. As the man put it, how the deuce should he know?

But, like Hamlet's father, Ike Thurton could have a tale unfolded had he so wished, and had he not been bound to secrecy by the only man he ever had any love for.

Strange, but true. This rough diamond, this phlegmatic stud-groom, loved 'Master Jack' better than anything in his life—ay, better than life itself. 'Master Jack' had once saved the stud-groom's life at the peril of his own. A dangerous horse had thrown Thurton to the ground, and was 'savaging' him, when Jack Drayton rushed in and turned the infuriated animal's anger on himself. He received a bite in the muscle of his right arm, the mark of which he must bear to his dying day, but he saved Ike Thurton's life, and the man never forgot it.

'No thanks, Ike!' was all young Drayton said as the groom literally overwhelmed him with expressions of faithfulness that few people would have thought Thurton capable of uttering. 'You would have done the same for me, I know.'

'By heaven, Master Jack, if ever the time comes when you need a friend, don't forget Ike Thurton. I'd lay down my life for you.'

'I believe you, Ike. Don't forget, if ever the time does come.'

Little did either of them think at the moment how soon the time really would come. Ike Thurton could tell a tale of that fated night when two lives were wrecked that would have astonished not only Squire Drayton, but everyone who admires true heroism and sacrifice. He could tell of a pistol-shot fired, of a bleeding form lying in a death-like trance on the cold ground. He could tell of a hurried flight and two figures rapidly driving away in the moonlight night. He could tell of careful nursing and patient tending of a nearly dying man in a lonely shepherd's hut, of a tedious recovery, and ultimate restoration to health. What more he could tell may at some future time be disclosed.

CHAPTER III.

ANOTHER DISAPPEARANCE.

SQUIRE DRAYTON'S study at the Hall was a model of ease and comfort, although it might not be considered a fitting boudoir for a lady of fashion, or even a congenial spot for a Cabinet minister.

It was not a large room, but it was big enough for the purpose for which it was used. A splendid view could be had from the windows, looking far away down the valley of the Dove, that most lovely of rivers, winding its silvery way into the dale of that name. This is the famous river in which old Izaak Walton used to follow his favourite pursuit, and if the tourist cared to trace its silvery windings down past Hartington, through romantic Beresford Dale, and that most enchanting spot, Dovedale, he might have a good glass of bitter at the 'Izaak Walton,' named after the famous angler. Many a fine trout had Squire Drayton caught in that river, and he loved the scenery of his native Derbyshire hills as only a man of his pursuits can.

He sat in an easy chair this beautiful June morning,

smoking his usual after-breakfast pipe. A huge mastiff lay on the hearthrug at his feet, a small toy terrier frisked about the big dog's nose, a couple of real Belvoir fox-terriers stood calmly watching the Squire's every movement with their keen sharp eyes, and a pointer and setter, together with a Clumber spaniel, completed the group. The Squire loved his dogs, and they loved him with that hearty canine appreciation of kindness which human beings would do well occasionally to follow.

Trophies of the chase were plentifully displayed. Foxes' brushes adapted to various uses, and Reynard's head also figured at a considerable distance further than ordinary from his tail. Guns, pistols, foils, and fishing-rods were in various parts of the room. Pictures of celebrated racehorses adorned the wall. Blair Athol, Gladiateur, Dutch Oven, Flying Dutchman, and Voltigeur could be seen. On the table were littered about a variety of papers, *The Field*, *Sporting and Dramatic Life*, etc., showing clearly where the Squire's literary tastes lay.

The inkstand, made from the hoof of a celebrated horse, reminded one of Whyte-Melville's spirited song, when he says, 'There's his hoof upon the table, his hide upon the floor.' This gives but a faint idea of Squire Drayton's sanctum, but it will suffice.

His pipe smoked, the Squire rang the bell, and was answered by his faithful old retainer, Peter Larkin.

'Has Thurton come up yet?' said the Squire; 'he's late this morning.'

'No, Squire; he hasn't come yet. Perhaps I'd better send down for him; he may be busy with the horses.'

'Yes, do, Pete, at once.'

The Squire always called his old servant 'Pete,' and the man liked it. He went off to execute his master's order, which he did by sending one of the lads to the stable as hard as the youngster could run.

In a few minutes the lad returned breathless, and evidently frightened out of his wits.

'He beant there, sur.'

'Not there, you young imp! What do you mean?'

'He's gone, sur. Roberts told me he left last noight, and here's a bit note he left for t' Squire.'

'Gone! Where's he gone? Any of the horses ill?' questioned the astonished Pete.

'No; t' horses are all roight. He told Roberts he was goin' fur good, and left him in charge o' th' stables,' replied the lad.

'You must come and see the Squire. Don't be frightened, boy, it's none of your fault, but I expect the Squire 'll be mighty wroth about it. What the deuce could have come to Ike? It must have been a very urgent message to take him away like that, without saying so much as a word to any of us.'

Pete took the half-frightened-to-death lad into the presence of the Squire, who looked up as they entered and asked what was the matter.

'Thurton's gone, Squire, and he left this note for you, which the lad brought up from the stables.'

'He should have told me before he went anywhere,' said the Squire. 'Thurton takes a little too much upon himself at times, but he's a valuable man, and I should not like to lose him. Did he say what time he should return?'

'He's gone for good, so Roberts says, and he left him in charge of the horses. The note may explain the matter,' said Pete.

'Gone for good!' exclaimed the astonished Squire. 'What on earth do you mean, Pete? Thurton would as soon think of drowning himself as running away from Drayton. Give me the letter. That will, no doubt, put the matter right.'

The Squire took the letter and opened it hastily. The stud-groom was not a very good writer, and the Squire had some difficulty in making out what the contents were. As he read his face expressed wonder and amazement. The letter was certainly an extraordinary one, and read as follows:

'HONOURED SIR,

'I have received a most urgent message which necessitates my absenting myself from Drayton for some months, or perhaps for ever. I have been a faithful servant to you, Squire, for many years, and it almost breaks my heart to leave Drayton, but I have no choice. I cannot

tell you where I am going, or why I am going, but trust you will forgive me any inconvenience my absence may cause you. I have thoroughly taught Roberts how to manage the horses, and he knows nearly as much as I do about them. Please do not tell him this, because if I had the luck to return at some future date he might bounce me about it. If you knew all, you would, I know, approve of the curious step I have taken, and this knowledge has given me courage to undertake a long and tedious journey. You have been the best of masters to me, Squire, and I shall for ever regret having to leave you. When I get to my journey's end, if I may write to you and explain I will do so, but until I receive permission to do this my disappearance must remain a mystery. Farewell, Squire, and may we meet again is the earnest wish of your most obedient servant,

'IKE THURTON.

'P.S.—I think Mohican is your best two-year-old, and I should not start him until the Derby next year. Roberts knows how to deal with him. Don't let Weston gallop him off his legs when you send him to be trained.'

The Squire did not know what to make of this letter. At first he thought he must have misunderstood its correct meaning, but when he read it again he had reluctantly to come to the conclusion that Thurton was gone. This put him in an exceedingly bad humour, and Pete, seeing a storm brewing, discreetly withdrew with the lad.

Pacing about his study, the Squire tried hard to fathom the mystery. He thought Thurton must have gone suddenly mad to make such a fool of himself. It was very inconvenient, the man going at this time, because the horses required a great deal of attention, and no man knew better than Squire Drayton the value of such a stud-groom as Thurton. For many years this man had attended to the Drayton stud, and to have him suddenly removed was a thing the Squire did not relish at all. True, he had Roberts to fall back upon, but then Roberts was not Thurton. Squire Drayton was one of those men who like their lives to flow on smoothly without sudden check or interruption. This disappearance of Thurton was therefore the more

irritating. He wondered where the man had gone to, and why he had gone. Suddenly the thought seemed to flash across him, 'What if Thurton had heard from the missing Jack and had gone away to him?'

The Squire knew well the fondness Thurton had for the missing son, and he felt it might be within the bounds of probability that he had gone to join him. The thought was not an unpleasant one, and it modified the Squire's wrath somewhat.

Captain Drayton, for a wonder, happened to be staying at the Hall, and he came into his father's study.

'Here's a nice state of things, Fred,' grumbled the Squire. 'That fellow Thurton has gone; cleared out just at the very time I wanted him most, and with no ostensible reason for so doing. Here, read his letter and see for yourself,' said the Squire, as he handed Thurton's letter to the Captain.

Captain Drayton read it carefully, and appeared quite as surprised as his father had been at its contents.

'What the deuce could have caused him to do this?' said Fred.

'I really don't know what to make of it,' said the Squire. 'I thought just before you came in he might in some unaccountable manner have heard from Jack and gone to him.'

Captain Drayton changed countenance as the Squire said this.

'Nonsense, father. Jack's dead or hanged by now. Besides, he would not be likely to write to Thurton or communicate with anyone in this neighbourhood. He daren't show his face here again if he was alive, which I don't believe he is. He's been a disgrace to our family long enough. Now, depend upon it, wherever Thurton has gone it is not with Jack,' said the Captain.

'I've told you once and for all never to speak of your lost brother like that in my hearing,' thundered the Squire. 'Jack, I feel sure, has done nothing to be ashamed of, and I believe Thurton knows all about it. If he's gone to fetch Jack back to me I wish him luck with all my heart.'

'Jack be d——!' fired the Captain. 'I'm sick of his name. Morning, noon, and night, I hear nothing else but

Jack this, and Jack that, and a long tale of imaginary wrongs he is suffering. He's no brother of mine.'

'Be silent, sir,' said the Squire, with suppressed wrath. 'If you say another word about it, I shall be tempted to say you are no son of mine. I dare say you know pretty well yourself, if the truth was known, why Jack ran away.'

Captain Drayton with difficulty suppressed his anger, but he knew his father, and that he would brook no dispute. But the Squire's last remark had evidently hit home, and Fred Drayton winced as his father's eyes glanced coldly and keenly at him.

'Upon my life, father, one would think you suspected me of having a hand in Jack's disappearance. I don't think you treat me fairly in this matter, sir.'

'Well, well, let it pass,' said the Squire. 'But don't malign your brother, Fred. It's not manly. D—— it, sir, it's not conduct worthy of an officer bearing her Majesty's uniform.'

To avoid further argument the Squire left the study, and taking up his hat and stick and calling his dogs, he went out of the house and walked in the direction of Thurton's cottage.

On the way he met Roberts, who respectfully saluted him. The Squire stopped him and asked what he knew about Thurton's going away.

'Only this, sir. He came to me last night about half an hour before the London mail was due at Drayton, and said he was going away for some months, perhaps for ever. He did not seem at all excited; but spoke deliberately, and I could tell he meant what he said. I asked him why he was going, but he refused to tell me. I then said the Squire would not think well of him for doing this, and he seemed cut up about it, but said it was no use, he must go. He gave me all instructions about the horses, sir, and I make so bold as to ask if you will let me have Thurton's place until he comes back, if he ever does so.'

'You shall have the place Thurton had, Roberts, and you can move into his cottage as soon as you please. Did Thurton say anything about Mohican to you?'

'Yes, Squire. He said he was the best two-year-old you ever had, and he hoped to be back to see him win the

Derby next year. He told me to persuade you, Squire, not to run the horse until the Derby, and not let Weston overtrain him. I found this bit of paper in the fender in Thurton's house this morning. It's a piece of a letter partly burnt,' and he handed it to the Squire.

He glanced at it, and saw the words: 'Come at once. Matter urgent. Squire forgive you if he knew all.' It was evident that this letter had called Thurton away. The handwriting was not familiar to the Squire. It looked as though a woman had written it, and this was stranger still, as Thurton had a decided antipathy to the charms of the softer sex. There was no more to be said on the subject at present, so the Squire went with Roberts to the stables, to see that the missing man had left all right.

The stalls at Drayton Hall were not modernized. The boxes were roomy, comfortable, well lighted, and had plenty of air; but there was no elaborate finishing about them.

The racers in training were with Weston at the private ground, some two miles away from the Hall, but the youngsters not yet despatched to that worthy were in the paddocks and boxes at the Hall.

Roberts opened the door of a box at the far end of the building, and in it was the two-year-old spoken of by Thurton.

Mohican was a bright chestnut, with a white blaze face, two white hind feet, and his near fore-foot white. He was the beau ideal of a perfect racehorse. Breed was there, strength in his powerful quarters and loins. A neatly-shaped head, intelligent eyes, a magnificent neck set well on to his fine shoulders. He was by Hermit—Fairy Queen, and he seemed destined to still further enhance the fame of his wonderful sire. Fairy Queen was the favourite matron of the Drayton stud, and she had never yet thrown a bad one.

As the Squire looked at this model of horseflesh, his eyes glistened with pride. That P.S. at the foot of Thurton's letter had been a soother to the information which had gone before it. The colt looked good enough to win anything.

The Squire seldom ran his two-year-olds, much preferring to keep them until they became more mature. He was often chaffed about this, but he still held stanchly to his

old-fashioned opinion that a three-year-old was all the better for not being run off its legs a year earlier.

Mohican glanced round as the Squire entered the box and patted his sleek, shining coat, soft as a woman's hand, delicate as the bloom on a maiden's cheek. He gave a playful snap at the hand that touched him so gently, and then proudly waited to be admired.

Your real thoroughbred is as fond of being admired as the greatest society beauty. He receives the praise bestowed upon him in a philosophical manner, and knows that he is worth his 'weight in gold.'

'He's a grand colt,' said Roberts. 'Begging your pardon, Squire, but if I might be so bold as to advise you, I'd follow out Thurton's idea and keep him for the Derby next year.'

'Perhaps I may and perhaps I mayn't,' snapped the Squire. 'What the devil Thurton meant by leaving a piece of horseflesh like that to the tender mercies of Weston I don't know.'

Roberts thought Thurton might easily have left the horse, but he was greatly surprised at his leaving Drayton, and such a master as the Squire. He was a smart, shrewd man, but he had not the stability of Thurton, nor had he got the groom's devoted care for horses. He was to be 'got at,' some people said of him. Perhaps he was; time will show.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAINER'S MISSION.

WHERE did Ike Thurton go when he so suddenly left Drayton? This story is built to some extent upon fact, and as a faithful chronicler I must take my readers rapidly along 'with the tide.' Ike Thurton is by no means a mythical individual.

The note Thurton received came from Jack Marston. It's no use beating about the bush. I hate mysteries. What's the use of trying to hoodwink people? They always say at the end of the book, 'I told you so,' 'Knew it all along,' 'Awful weak plot,' and so forth.

But although the note came from Jack Marston it was not written by him. There was, however, a certain instruction in it which Thurton understood, and he knew at once who had sent it, and where he had to go. Marston had become so thoroughly lonely and destitute that he felt he must have a familiar face near him; moreover, he had a scheme in hand which needed a shrewd, honest man to work, and a man who knew all about racehorses and their management. So he despatched a letter to Ike Thurton, at Drayton Hall, and the result of the arrival of that missive has already been described.

Ike had never been at sea before, but that made very little difference to him. He packed up a few belongings and went on board the *Iberia* at Tilbury with as much ease as he would have gone into the Drayton stables.

When he left the Hall he caught the mail up to London. Ike knew London as well as a Scotland Yard detective, or nearly so. He considered it was his business to know all about London, and what Ike considered to be his business he generally contrived to find out all about. He did not go to a fashionable hotel. That was not Ike's way at all. He didn't even select a sporting house to put up at. He proceeded from St. Pancras Station to a quiet commercial house off Cheapside, not a hundred miles from Bennett's, with its great Gog and Magog clock outside. He didn't even indulge in the luxury of a hansom from the station; he preferred walking, although it was early morning.

Fancy a man in these fast-going days setting out for Australia—for such is Ike's destination—with a carpet-bag, and clothed in a regular horsy rig-out. Great Scott! he'd be set down as a lunatic.

No, the modern idea of setting out for Australia appears to be to get as much superfluous luggage together as possible for the voyage. Buy heaps of clothes that are no earthly use when you get to the land of the Southern Cross. Take a cartload of novels, which are never read on the voyage; heaps of packet tobacco, which goes mouldy; a pair of indiarubber-soled shoes, which glue to the deck in the tropics; rugs, which invariably get lost; a canvas chair, which breaks down and disappears overboard before the Bay of Biscay is crossed; a flask, which is never wanted; a

diary, which never gets written ; slippers, which are of no use ; hats, which blow off with the first puff of wind ; cigars of the best brands, which are wasted, not in the desert, but in the sea air.

Ike had none of these things, and if he had but known it, he was better equipped for a sea voyage than many a man who has spent a hundred pounds on an outfit. Ike had a hat which fitted his head like only a stud-groom's can. It would have taken a tornado to blow Ike's hat off. I verily believe his head would have had to go with it had such a thing happened. A gale of wind would never have moved Ike's trousers, so neatly did they fit over his boots. He had a pipe that it would have taken a mighty big wave to put out, and he had tobacco a sailor would have given anything for. His carpet-bag didn't contain a superfluity of clothes, and as for collars, well, they would not trouble him much during the voyage.

Ike looked a peculiar figure as he walked rapidly towards the hotel he had selected. But he is not out of place in his surroundings. He knew more about 'Modern Babylon' than many a West-End swell or East-End ''Arry.'

He took no notice of anyone, but several people looked at him. Cabby cast a curious eye at the tight-fitting breeches, and thought, 'He's a Newmarketer, he is. Not up here for nothing, you bet. He's got the straight griff for something.'

Cabby was not far out. Ike had the 'straightest griff' he ever had in his life, and that was to mount *Iberia* for Sydney.

As he turned into, let me call it, the Bell Inn, the porter in the hall, who was half asleep, hastily got up to answer the ringing of the bell. It must be borne in mind that Ike had come up by the night mail. But London never sleeps, and Ike's tramp through the city had not been lonely.

'Oh! it's you, Mr. Thurton? Old room, sir. Your wire was received all right. Shall I take your bag up?' said the man.

He treated this horsy-looking Ike with more deference than he would have shown to the best customer at the Bell. Many a good tip had Thurton given him, and Ike's half-crowns were thrown pretty freely about when he came up to town.

'All right, Jackson. I'll go upstairs. Never mind the bag.'

Away he went, and in five minutes was sound asleep, as though mysterious disappearances from Drayton and sudden departures for Australia were an every-day occurrence in his life.

He was up at seven, and had had his breakfast before the 'regulars' came down. He went out, and, as soon as the office opened, he booked his passage as 'Jonas Smith,' for Sydney, per s.s. *Iberia*. When Ike asked for a saloon ticket the clerk thought he must have made a mistake, but he was quickly undeceived, for Thurton paid for his berth as though it was a mere trifle, and then went out. He forgot he didn't know when the ship sailed, so he went back and asked.

'To-morrow,' said the astonished clerk. 'Didn't you know that?'

'Shouldn't have been such an ass as to ask if I did,' was the reply.

'Rum fellow that,' said the clerk to one of his mates. 'Running away, I'll bet; Jonas Smith—just mark it down, please.'

Ike passed the day quietly, and next morning went down to Tilbury and boarded the *Iberia*.

He looked a curious figure to go to sea, and when he presented his first-class ticket the officer at the gangway stared hard at him. Ike knew as much about a ship as a Queensland black would know about Whitechapel if he was suddenly planted down there. But he soon made himself at home. Money will work wonders, and a few half-crowns judiciously laid out made Ike well known amongst the stewards and waiters on the ship.

He had a comfortable cabin, and as the ship had not a very full list, he had it to himself—at any rate, for the present. He sat on the bunk, pulled out his pipe, and commenced to smoke.

About two whiffs of the fragrant weed had been wafted outside the cabin door when a voice sang out:

'No smoking here, sir!'

'Where the deuce can I smoke then?' said he. 'You don't mean to tell me a fellow can't smoke in his own bedroom!'

The man pointed to the printed regulations, which he studied with a solid countenance.

'Well, I'm blest,' was his remark. 'I shall never learn all that rigmarole before I get to the end of the voyage. Eh, waiter!' he called out to a man in the saloon.

'Yes, sir.'

'What's all this about? I can't bottom it all. Look here, you keep your eye on me, and if I don't carry out them regulations, tip me,' said Ike.

'Tip you!' said the astonished man.

'You know, give me the wink. I'll tip you then.'

The tipping problem seemed more satisfactory to the man, and he thought Thurton, or rather 'Jonas Smith,' a curious sort of saloon passenger.

Suddenly there came a crash, a rattle, a shriek, a yell, and the whole vessel vibrated. Ike thought there had been a collision. He rushed up the cabin stairs, upset an old gentleman on the deck, charged into the purser, and ran on until he came to a stop against the rails. Then he pulled himself together, looked around and saw the ship was moving, and that the land was gliding past, so he thought. It was merely that the anchor was weighed, the screw had revolved, and Ike Thurton was bound for Australia.

'Crikey, I thought she'd burst, blown up, become a shipwreck or something,' said Ike.

Finding all was safe Ike looked about him. His fellow passengers, or some of them, were indulging in frantic gesticulations. They were merely waving their adieux to their friends on the steam tender, which was now receding fast from view.

Ike looked thoughtful. He had had no time to think until now. But he realized now the full consequences of the step he had taken. Many a man has been placed in a similar position to Ike Thurton. The first suggestion of a voyage to Australia has its fascination, and in the sanguine anticipation of six weeks' idleness, and the thought of seeing new scenes, new countries, and new faces, the old folk at home are apt to be forgotten.

But when the ship moves off and the excitement of the departure has subsided, there comes a revulsion. 'It may be for ever' is our thought as the vessel ploughs on her

way. Friends we never valued fully until we are leaving them, the dear old home, the lovely landscapes, of which we thought so little, are remembered with feelings of almost sorrow.

Ike's eyes actually grew dim. He thought of the Squire and what he would think of his desertion. He thought of all the years he had been at Drayton Hall, and the many kindnesses he had received there. His heart fairly ached when he thought of that pet of his horsy life, the idol of his stud-groom life, the bright, beautiful chesnut Mohican, whom he had prided himself should win the Derby, the first Derby for the master of Drayton. How would that lovely animal get on without his tender care? He fairly ground his teeth when he thought of his darling being left to the tender mercies of Weston and Roberts. Then Ike's mind wandered back to that scene of five years ago, when he had nursed a dying man to life again. It was this thought that sent the blood coursing through his veins. Captain Drayton's figure came vividly before him, as he saw it on that bright moonlight night. The thought made him shudder; but it also solaced him, for he knew that in leaving Drayton Hall he was doing his duty.

What was his duty to do with a stud-groom? I can tell my readers that Ike Thurton, groom though he was, had a heart and feelings that are seldom found under the white diamond-studded shirt of the society swell. Ike was of the stuff of which heroes in humble life are made. He had his faults—who has not? but faithlessness and treachery were unknown to him. As he thought of 'Master Jack' his face glowed with satisfaction. Five years had Ike yearned to see his young master and clasp his hand, and now the welcome summons had come. He was going to see the man supposed to be dead — he was travelling to the country which held the being dearest to him on earth. And then Ike had a vision. Stud-grooms have visions, my fine gentlemen. Stud-grooms have dreams of splendour, my glittering, dazzling dames. And Ike dreamt a dream. He saw in the future the old Squire rejoicing in the return of the prodigal son. He saw the 'fatted calf' killed at Drayton Hall. He saw 'Miss Rosey' clasped in her long-lost brother's arms, and he saw a mother's greeting of a long

absent child. And Ike saw more, for he witnessed a wrong man righted and a repentant sinner making atonement. What more Ike must have seen I know not, but the dinner-gong sounded and he fancied another explosion must have taken place. It's not my intention to dwell upon Ike's voyage. It is very much like other voyages. He was very ill in the Bay of Biscay. He recovered in the Mediterranean. He looked upon the Suez Canal as a miserable dyke, and the Red Sea as a scene of desolation and some other 'ation.' He enjoyed the real ocean voyage from Aden to Adelaide, and very few incidents occurred to disturb the monotony of his existence.

Ike made but few friends, but the captain took a great fancy to him. With that ready recognition which many seamen have of all that is good and noble in a man, Captain Wilson saw that beneath a rough exterior Ike had a heart of sterling worth. The pair had many yarns together, and Ike related some turf experiences which made the captain roar with laughter, and even Ike smiled for once in a way.

But when Ike related how he had come on board with a carpet-bag and one suit of clothes; and how, when the steward asked him if he would have his baggage up, and he replied 'Yes, if they could find it;' and how the whole of the passengers' luggage, labelled 'wanted on the voyage,' was handed out of the hold, and none for 'Jonas Smith' found; and how he explained to the men who communicated with him on the loss of his baggage, that 'he never had any,' the captain nearly went into convulsions. Melbourne, glorious Melbourne, was reached at last. And when an enthusiastic Victorian asked Ike what he thought of *that*, pointing to the vast city sprung up like a mushroom, and Ike replied, 'It's a nice sort of place; pretty fair for savages to live in,' the horror-struck Melbournite fled in disgust.

Under way once more. A fair wind and quiet sea, and then Sydney Heads was reached.

It was a lovely morning, the sun shining brightly on the beautiful scene. He was all excitement. He knew in a very short space of time he should be in Sydney, and that he should meet the man he had come so far to see. The ship steams into the harbour. On, on she goes, and in a

few minutes Ike Thurton will land at Circular Quay. At the same wharf we saw Jack Marston so sadly watch the *Liguria* leave a few short weeks before.

CHAPTER V.

IKE'S FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

When Ike Thurton landed in Sydney he did not appear at all bewildered. No one would have set Ike down for a 'new chum,' although he had never been out of old England before. He had been directed by the writer of the letter he had received to go to Tattersall's, and there he would find Jack Marston. So philosophical Ike calmly inquired where Tattersall's was, and being directed to go straight up Pitt Street, he soon found himself before the doors of the head betting quarters in New South Wales.

He knew better than go inside. He had an idea that somebody would want to know who he was, or what business he had there. Certainly, he might have been taken for a jockey, as when he had 'got down' a bit he could turn the scale at about 7 st. 8 lb. But although he looked like a jockey, and in fact had ridden many a good race in years gone by, his face was not familiar in Tattersall's rooms, considering he had only been in Sydney a few hours.

So Ike contented himself by strolling about on the pavement, first up and then down the street. He must have stayed a couple of hours, when he commenced to feel hungry, and he dived into the nearest restaurant.

Up to this time Ike had never spoken a word to anyone bar the man he had asked to direct him to Tattersall's. As I have before mentioned, Ike was as hard to draw as a badger.

During the time he had been loitering about Tattersall's he had been keenly scrutinized by many of the habitués of that place. Instinctively they felt, as only sporting men can feel, that this curious little man was 'one of them.'

Various were the conjectures as to who he was. A jockey was the general opinion. But what jockey? They

had never seen him on a racecourse at all; the crack riders were as familiar to them as their own children.

Ike, having taken a quiet meal, came down the street once more and renewed his watch. He meant to see Marston if possible, and yet he was not anxious, because the object of his quest did not know of his arrival.

At last a bookmaker, well known in the ring, asked him what he wanted, and if he could be of any service in finding anyone for him.

Ike eyed his questioner, and replied that he was merely waiting for a friend, and he didn't think anyone could help him, as it was a very bad job.

'What's a bad job?' was the next query.

'Well, you see, I'm stone broke. Haven't got a stiver. I suppose you couldn't help me out of that mess?' said Ike.

'Yes, but I could, though,' was the ready response; 'here's a quid for you, my man,' and the generous bookie, who had had a real good settling, handed Ike a sovereign.

'You're a brick!' was Ike's astonished exclamation. 'I never expected it. What's yer name? If I can ever do you a turn I will. You needn't smile. Perhaps I may be able to put you on a good 'un some day.'

Now a bookmaker, as a rule, is somewhat superstitious. The man thought for a minute, and then said: 'Well, there's no telling. Perhaps I may have to borrow a sov. off you some day. Ups and downs in every life, you know. That's my name,' and handing Ike a card he strode away. Ike looked at it and read, 'Tom Bates, Tattersall's Club, Sydney.'

Now when Ike had said he was 'stone broke' he had an idea that would speedily make his questioner depart. He had no notion of receiving a sovereign. Had he wanted it he felt certain he would never have got it. It's generally the case. A fellow really down in his luck can never raise a shilling, but a man with ready cash can borrow an almost unlimited supply. Ike's knowledge of some of the bookmakers he had met in the old land led him to believe that 'hard-uppishness' would scare any knight of the pencil away. He looked at the sovereign, and put the card in his pocket. Then he strolled down the street until he came to a watchmaker's.

'Put me this coin on the end of my chain,' said Ike, as he pulled a small gold albert out of his pocket.

The man looked and said, 'You have made a mistake in the coin, I think; this is a sovereign.'

'Well, can't a man have a sovereign on his watch-chain if he wants?' said Ike.

'Certainly; but I thought you had a rare coin you wanted put on, and had made a mistake.'

'Sovs. are rare enough sometimes,' said Ike, 'and I don't mean to part company with this one. Put it on, there's a good fellow.'

'All right,' said the assistant, and in a very short time a hole had been drilled through it, and Tom Bates' sovereign dangled from Ike's watch-chain.

'How much?' said Ike.

'Oh, I won't charge you for that! No trouble, you know,' said the assistant.

'Thanks,' was all Ike could say.

He went out of the shop utterly astonished. This was the second occurrence that had actually surprised Ike in an hour, and it took a good deal to make Ike elevate his eyebrows. He thought Australia must be a very nice place. Here was a bookmaker who had given him a sovereign for the asking, and a watchmaker's assistant who had put the coin on to his chain for nothing.

'Never saw anything like this before,' he soliloquized. 'If I'd asked some of our home bookies to part up a sov. they'd have told me to go to the devil, probably. If I'd asked a London jeweller to do that little job he'd have charged me five bob.'

Ike took out his chain and fastened it to his watch.

'There,' he said, as he played with the coin dangling down from his waistcoat; 'you and I'll never part company, my beauty, if I can help it. And if that Tom Bates ever wants a coin you'll go back to him straight, with two or three more to boot.'

Ike did not see Marston that day. As night came on he wondered where he should put up. At last a thought struck him. 'Perhaps he'll be at the racecourse in the morning; at any rate I'll go and chance it. I want to see some of these Australian animals.'

He asked a likely-looking man where the racecourse was, and if there was a hotel near it.

'Lots of 'em,' was the reply. 'Take the Randwick tram, and you'll be all right.'

Ike took the Randwick tram. He didn't admire this method of locomotion, and in this he was not alone, for a good many people in this fair city of Sydney were of his way of thinking. He got a bed at Brown's hotel, where he slept the sleep of the just.

They couldn't make Ike out at the hotel. He paid in advance, went to bed at nine o'clock, and took nothing to drink. The genius presiding over the bar was of opinion Ike contemplated suicide.

At four o'clock in the morning Ike was up and out. Where the racecourse was he didn't know, but he had an idea it would be somewhere down hill on the flat. So down hill he went until he came to Newmarket Corner, and when he turned round and saw the neat little village, Ike felt quite at home.

'Dash me if this isn't like Drayton!' he muttered. 'Regular horsy place this. Fine stables there,' he went on, as he glanced at the magnificent establishment where the Hon. James White's cracks are quartered, presided over by that prince of Australian trainers, Tom Payten. A string of horses came out of the gates as Ike went slowly down the road. They went up the white sandy hill, and Ike after them. The lads eyed him curiously. They couldn't make him out.

Ike kept at a respectful distance, and tramped on. He knew the string were bound for the racecourse, and that was where he meant to go. He narrowly scanned the horses in front of him, and, from what he saw, he concluded when stripped they must be a very fine team. The racecourse was reached at the far side, and he had a good view of the grand stand and the course generally. He was rather surprised. He had not expected to see a 'Randwick.' He did not say anything—perhaps because there was no one handy to say it to. What he wanted now was to get to the other side of the course, for it was there he felt sure he would see Jack Marston if he happened to be out. His practised eye could tell at a glance on the opposite side the people would congregate.

He slipped under the rails, and quietly walked across the ground.

'Who's that fellow?' said one of the lads.

'Don't know, Bill. But he knows his way about, though.'

The lad was right. He did know his way about. He was soon across the course. There were not many people out, for it was a cold morning and no gallops of importance were to take place, at least that the usual body of 'watchers' were aware of. A few horses went round at an ordinary canter, but Ike took very little notice of them.

At last a chestnut came striding along.

'What's that?' involuntarily said Ike.

'Don't you know him?' said a voice at his elbow. 'That's Cranbrook. Everybody knows him.'

'He's a big fellow,' was Ike's comment, and then he took more interest in the work.

He had been there an hour, and no Jack Marston had appeared. He went round to the horses and proceeded to look about. He was evidently well satisfied.

'You do things up to the nines here,' said Ike to a trainer, who was putting a fine-looking chestnut to rights, preparatory to giving him a breather.

'Stranger, eh?' said the trainer.

'Yes,' replied Ike.

'England?'

'Yes.'

'In our line?'

'Not much. Did a bit of it in the old country,' said Ike.

'You're a bit ancient to come and make a start here, ain't you?' said the trainer.

'Don't intend making a start,' said Ike. 'I've come out here for the benefit of my health.'

'Gammon. You're tough enough, you are,' was the reply.

'What horse is that?' said Ike, changing the subject.

'This,' said the trainer, as he slipped the cloth off, 'is Caloola.'

'Kal—what?' said Ike.

'Caloola,' said the trainer.

Ike made another attempt and got the name out correctly.

'Looks a good colt,' said Ike.

'Yes, he's a bit of a duster, but he's the devil's own temper,' said the trainer.

'I know that,' was Ike's confident reply.

'How the devil should you know it?' snapped the trainer. 'You don't handle him, do you?'

'Eyes,' was the laconic reply.

'Of course he's got eyes.'

'Ears,' said Ike.

'Well, you're a rum 'un,' laughed the trainer, now thoroughly amused, and thinking Ike not half a bad sort. 'Look here, can you ride?'

'A bit,' said Ike.

'Want a job?'

'Don't mind.'

'Well, I'll ask Mr. Marston about you; I know he wants a man,' said the trainer.

'Ask who?' said Ike.

'Mr. Marston. He owns Caloola.'

'Whew!' whistled Ike.

'Hang it, what are you doing? you'll frighten the brute,' said the trainer, as the colt lashed out viciously.

'Will the master be here this morning?' said Ike.

'I'm just waiting for him before I take the colt out,' said the trainer. 'The beggar's been at the private ground, and this is his first appearance at Randwick. I don't fancy he'll like it at all. Mr. Marston said we were to wait till the course was a bit clear before we took him out.'

'He's a grand colt,' said Ike. 'Best I've seen this morning.'

'Oh, he's all very well, but he's not the horse the boss thinks him. He's backed the brute to win him a fortune for the Derby and Cup. He's more money than sense to do that, I think.'

It was on the tip of Ike's tongue to tell the trainer that Marston knew more about a horse than he did, but he kept quiet. He began to have an idea why Jack Marston had sent for him. It was evident the trainer did not think much of his 'boss,' as he called him, nor did he to all appearances think much of the horse. It flashed over him in a minute. Jack Marston had backed Caloola to win him a great stake. He did not trust his trainer, and he

had sent for him (Ike) to help him to win the race he had put his heart upon—in fact, to train the horse. Ike looked at the colt again. A light chestnut; so was Mohican, the pet he had left behind. 'A coincidence,' thought Ike; 'funny if they should both win, the one for the Squire, the other for Master Jack.'

A hansom, driven at a rapid pace, came dashing through the gate, and pulled up sharp.

'Here's Mr. Marston, now,' said the trainer.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MEETING.

When Ike Thurton heard the trainer say 'Here's Mr. Marston,' he hardly—to use a common but expressive phrase—knew whether he 'stood on his head or his heels.' Now the time he had looked forward to for five years had arrived he became strangely agitated. Master Jack was within a stone's-throw of him, and Ike positively wished to avoid him until he had had a good look at him unobserved. 'Would he be much changed?' thought Ike. 'Perhaps he would not know him.'

Ike quietly slipped unobserved into the next box, and waited until Marston came up. He had not to wait long. In a few minutes he heard a voice saying, in tones he loved so well, and which sounded like music in his ears:

'Ready to go out, Fletcher? I'm rather late, but it's all the better. I don't want the colt to be flurried at first. He'll soon get used to company. We must give his temper a chance, and not fidget him. Looks well, 'pon my word. A bit fleshy, but that's all the better.'

'Yes, he looks well,' said Fletcher. That was the name of Marston's trainer—Harry Fletcher—'Spider,' as he was sometimes called, on account of one or two young gamblers he had got into his meshes and fleeced pretty heavily. 'But he's not the colt you think he is, sir. He's such a devil's own temper there's no managing him at times, and I don't fancy his heart's in the right place. A cut with the whip

curls him up directly. He won't finish under the lash, of that you may be sure.'

'He merely wants proper handling,' said Marston. 'His temper must be humoured. Have you heard of a likely man yet? I want a steady fellow, and one who can hold his tongue.'

'There was a man here talking to me when you drove up, sir—a wiry-looking fellow. Looks as though he'd been a jockey. Said he was a new arrival. I told him he was a bit too old to come out here. He looked a likely man, though; I wonder where he can have got to?' said Fletcher.

'A stranger, you say? A new arrival? What sort of a looking man was he?' said Marston.

'Oh, a thin, knowing fellow; hair a tinge of gray; tight-fitting pants, soft slouch hat; looked a bit ferrety about the face and eyes; about forty or thereabouts, I should say.'

'By Jove!' muttered Marston, 'supposing it should be Ike? He would hardly have got out here by now. If he has he hasn't lost much time. Take the colt out, Fletcher, and put Willie up; he's about the only lad that can manage him properly,' said Marston.

The lad was flung into the saddle. Caloola recognised the fact by lashing out with both heels, and then endeavoured to balance himself straight on his hind-legs. Down he came again, and lashed out once more. The lad stuck to the saddle like a limpet to a rock, and never moved a muscle.

'Leave his head alone, Fletcher,' said Marston.

'He'll kill somebody yet, the brute!' growled the trainer.

Caloola, having indulged in a few more antics, proceeded calmly to walk towards the gate leading to the course. A horse went striding past at the time. For the space of a second or two Caloola stood still. He quivered in every limb. His nostrils extended and ears laid back, he turned up the whites of his eyes, and then, with a bound and a tug that would have thrown many a lad out of the saddle, he galloped down the track. Willie held on to him like grim death, but the masterful brute had evidently got a grip of the bit. Away they went at a great pace.

'He'll kill the lad, Mr. Marston, safe as he's born; the

devil himself couldn't hold him when he's like that,' said Fletcher.

'If he'll keep to the track, he'll run himself out at that pace,' said Marston.

'I wouldn't have Willie hurt for a thousand pounds. D——n the brute! what's he at now?'

Marston had his glasses and took a hurried glance.

'Confound him! he's clean bolted, Fletcher; what's to be done? It's a hundred to one he makes for the gate when he gets here. If the thing's shut he'll smash into it. If it's open he may go straight to the boxes. Yes, that's the best chance.'

Ike Thurton had followed calmly behind, and took in the situation at a glance. The horse must be checked at any cost, or the probability is Caloola and his rider would be seriously hurt, if not killed. So intent were Fletcher and Jack Marston in watching the excited animal they never saw Ike, nor did the few people who were watching the struggle with breathless interest.

'If I know anything about that brute,' thought Ike, 'he'll run into the fence and try to get rid of his rider. If he does he'll smash the lad.'

'Who's that fellow?' said Marston, as Ike ran rapidly past in the direction of the judge's box.

'That's the fellow who was talking to me before you came up. What the deuce is he after? Must be tired of his life,' said Fletcher, as Ike got straight in the track of the runaway horse.

'Stand back, you fool!' roared out Marston.

Ike took no notice. He stood right in the way of the approaching horse. The excitement was intense. The few spectators present were awe-struck. They expected to see this rash man knocked down and fearfully hurt, if not killed. It was evident he meant to try and stop the runaway.

'Good God, Fletcher, he'll be killed! He's a daring fellow, any way. If he does stop that brute and get clear I'll look after him for the rest of his days.'

On came Caloola. The thunder of his hoofs on the turf could now be heard. The lad saw Ike in front and made another desperate attempt to stop the horse. He appeared

to check his terrific speed a little, but Caloola was still going at a great pace. On he came straight for Ike.

It all happened in a second. How, people could hardly tell. Ike moved a shade on one side. Quick as lightning he dashed at the bridle as Caloola came up. The infuriated horse dragged him several yards; but Ike held on with a grip like iron. Luckily the bridle held out. Caloola swerved; the weight dragged him towards the fence. Another brief space of time, and Ike was sent with a rattle against the railing. He still held on, but the force of the concussion had partially stunned him, and his hold was relaxing when Fletcher and Marston got up. They were just in time. Fletcher caught hold of Caloola's head as the bridle fell from Ike's grasp and he swooned away. The horse appeared cowed by what had happened, and was comparatively quiet.

'Take him away, Fletcher; I'll look after the man,' said Marston.

Jack Marston stooped over the prostrate form. Ike had fallen face downwards when he let go his hold. Marston turned him gently over, and held up his head. He gave one look at the face, and then, with a startled cry, said:

'Good God, it's Ike!'

Yes, it was Ike. This was their meeting, face to face, after five years' absence. What memories rushed into Marston's brain as he endeavoured to restore Ike to consciousness! A flask of brandy was offered him by one of the men who had come up, and he forced a few drops down Ike's throat.

To meet like this after five years! It seemed to Jack Marston that there was a fatality about it. In that far-off time it was Ike who had held Marston's head on his knee, and brought back the life that had nearly been taken from him. Now the positions were reversed, and fourteen thousand miles away from Drayton Marston was doing a like office for Ike.

In a few minutes Ike opened his eyes and looked about him in a dazed sort of way. At last he cast a glance upwards and saw the face bending over him with a look of tenderness in the fine blue eyes.

'Master Jack,' he murmured.

'Yes, Ike, I'm here. Dear old boy, how are you now? What a strange meeting, Ike, after these five long years! But you mustn't talk now. Where's the pain?' he said, as Ike gave a groan.

'My head,' muttered Ike.

Marston examined the back of Ike's head, and found a nasty gash there. He took out his handkerchief and bound it round the wound; then he gave him another strong dose of brandy, and Ike began to recover. In a few minutes he was sufficiently able to walk to allow Marston to lead him to the cab. He placed him inside and propped him up with his overcoat.

'Home,' he said to the cabby.

They were soon rattling down the Randwick Road, and although the noise made Ike's head swim round, he never uttered a word as to whether he was in pain or not.

Arrived at the Oxford Hotel, Ike was quickly taken to Marston's rooms, and a doctor at once sent for. He said there was no danger, and no fear of concussion of the brain, and after plastering up the cut he pronounced Ike all right.

'I've a pretty tough skull, doctor. That blow would have smashed a good many men all to pieces.'

Marston related how the accident happened, and the doctor was astonished the wounds were not more serious.

After a good night's rest Ike was all right and ready to talk. The question was where to begin. Jack Marston had so many questions to ask about the old home and the Drayton people, that he was somewhat confused. At last, in despair, he said:

'Tell me all about the old folk at home, Ike. How are my dear old father and mother, and what did they think of my disappearance?'

Ike commenced his narrative in his usual abrupt fashion. He told Jack Marston of the stigma resting upon his name, for the reader will by this time have surmised that Jack Marston and Jack Drayton were one and the same person, but for the sake of the narrative I will still continue to call him Jack Marston. He said the Squire had faith in his long-lost son, and so had his mother; but the general opinion in the neighbourhood, Ike said, was against Master

Jack. He made Marston's blood boil when he related how Captain Drayton persisted in saying his brother was guilty of the baseness attributed to him, and wound up by saying he hoped Master Jack would go home at once and disprove the foul wrong his brother had done and was doing him still.

Marston heard Ike's 'plain, unvarnished tale' almost in silence, and when he had finished, said:

'Tell me, Ike, what became of—well, you know whom I mean.'

'She came home to die, Master Jack. That blackguard, although he's a Drayton, deserted her. She never said a word about it, but she declared to her father on her death-bed that you were not the man she went away with, and who betrayed her. She's not worth a thought, Master Jack. She deserted you; it was not your fault.'

'God knows it was not, Ike. I'd have given my life to save her a moment's pain. I cannot make out what possessed her to go away with Fred,' said Marston.

'You're a bit sore there yet, I see,' said Ike. 'Wipe it out and go home, Master Jack.'

'Never, Ike. I'll never go home until that devil who calls himself my brother has confessed all to my father. He must do it some day, Ike. He'll have a pretty long string of iniquities to answer for when his time does come,' said Marston.

'You'll have to stop a long time if you wait till he speaks out,' said Ike. 'The Squire has a positive hatred of him, I feel sure, and I fancy he more than suspects Captain Drayton had a hand in that affair himself. You were always the pet at Drayton, Master Jack, and the place was not the same after you left.'

'I should never have left it alive if it hadn't been for you, Ike. It would kill my father if he knew all,' said Marston.

'Not it,' said Ike. 'He'd get in a towering rage, maybe he'd have a fit; but all his wrath would be hurled at the Captain, and I for one should not be sorry to see him kicked out.'

'I can't go home yet, at any rate, Ike. I've got a big game on hand. I'm playing for high stakes, and that's why I sent for you. I knew you'd come, old fellow, and the

only compunction I had was in robbing the Squire of you. How are all the horses, Ike?'

'Splendid,' was the reply. 'It did cut me up a bit leaving 'em, Master Jack, but when I thought of seeing you I felt I could go to the end of the world, and, by gad, I believe I've got here. There's a two-year-old in the Drayton stables is head and shoulders above anything we ever had there before. He's called Mohican, by Hermit—Forest Queen. He's a real beauty, and if the Squire doesn't win the Derby with him, well, I shall be surprised. I left him a bit of a note before I came away, and asked him not to start the colt before the Derby, and not let Weston run him off his legs. If he takes my advice he'll win.'

'How I should like to see him!' said Marston. 'What's he like?'

And then Ike became enthusiastic, and gave such a glowing description of the bit of horseflesh that Marston thought Mohican must be one of the best colts ever foaled.

'But what am I to do now I am out here?' was Ike's remark at the conclusion of his description of his favourite colt.

'Let's have luncheon, and I'll tell you, old fellow.'

'But I can't lunch with you, Master Jack.'

'Can't you? We'll see about that. Look here, Ike, we're not at Drayton. I'm not your young master now. I'm Jack Marston and you're Ike Thurton, my very good friend—my oldest and best friend. Do you hear that, Ike?' said Marston, as he gripped his honest hard hand, and dragged him off to the dining-saloon.

CHAPTER VII.

CHANGING TRAINERS.

'FROM what I heard from Fletcher, I am quite sure he hasn't much love for you. I will take charge of Caloola, and he will go; but you will make a dangerous enemy of him. If I understand the man's looks at all he'd not stick at a trifle. I think I shall be able to manage Caloola. For one thing, I don't think the colt will forget that grip I had

on his bridle yesterday morning. My own opinion is that Fletcher has not treated him properly. The horse cannot bear the fellow near him, is frightened of him, in fact, and that's the worst possible thing that can happen between a trainer and his horses. I've not had much to do with training since I was your father's stud-groom; but I think I can improve upon Fletcher's style.'

'No doubt about that,' said Marston.

'The difficulty will be how to make it right with Fletcher,' went on Ike. 'He will be in a terrible temper about it, and more especially when he finds I am to take his place, as he expected to have me engaged under him. You must do the thing very carefully, or I'm afraid there'll be a row. A man like that, when once you get his back up, can say and do nasty things.'

'Why did I send for you, Ike? Well, to begin at the beginning, I'm nearly at the end of my tether. I should have been ruined long enough since, only I managed to have one or two good wins, and that pulled me up a bit. Open confession is good for the soul, and I may as well tell you I have lost a pile of money at hazard lately. It's a game I've no luck at, but I get fascinated with it; and once I hear the rattle of the dice it takes a lot to stop me. Hard hit, that's what's the matter, Ike, and I'm going for a recovery. I have made a solemn vow I won't handle a dice-box again until after the Melbourne Cup, and perhaps by that time I may have got over the infatuation. Had I left the green cloth alone, and been contented with the green turf, which is a dashed sight healthier, I should have been well off,' said Marston.

Many a man has had cause to say this before now. It is not the 'turf' that ruins our great gamblers, it is the 'tables'; and the richest man, if he tempts fortune there long enough, will eventually come to grief.

'I see,' said Ike.

'You saw Caloola yesterday morning. Had a nice first meeting with the beauty, hadn't you, Ike? By Jove! I thought you were done for, old fellow, although at the time I did not know who it was, or I should have rushed up and pulled you off the course. I bought Caloola some six months back. It is not often you can get hold of a good

Chester, but I managed this through a friend of mine who is intimate with the owner of that celebrated sire, for you must know, Ike, that Chester is the Hermit of Australia. However, I did get him, and at a moderate figure too. Three hundred guineas he cost, and Payten said he was cheap at the money, as the only fault he'd got was a devil of a temper. This, again, is unusual for a Chester, as his get are generally quiet and docile, but a bit lazy. Caloola, however, appears to be an exception to the general rule, for no one can accuse him of being sluggish, or of having the temper of an angel.'

He smiled. He thought if Caloola's temper was anything like an angel's it must be one of those which followed the prince of darkness when he emigrated to the lower regions.

'Fletcher, the man you saw at the course, doesn't understand the colt, or else he will not try to train him. I don't like the man. He has a somewhat shady reputation, which I did not find out until after I had engaged him. I want you to take his place, Ike, and look after the colt for me. If there is one man better able to manage a bad-tempered horse than another, you are the identical individual. Fletcher does not like me, and I don't like him, so there'll be no love lost in parting. I've backed Caloola to win me a big stake for the next Melbourne Derby and Cup, and if he doesn't pull it off, well, then, I'm floored, Ike, for I owe a good bit of money now, although I'm glad to say it's not to the bookmakers.'

'That's all,' said Ike.

'Yes, that's all, and quite enough too, is it not?' said Marston.

'Yes, it's about enough for one man to carry, I should imagine,' said Ike.

'Whatever he may say will matter very little,' said Marston. 'If he does anything he had better take care. I'm easy-going, as you know, Ike, but I've had some curious experiences out here, and the man that plays me false will suffer.'

More conversation ensued, and eventually it was decided that Marston should pay Fletcher a month's wages, and hand Caloola over to Ike in the morning.

As might have been expected, there was a scene, and it

was, perhaps, not a wise policy on Marston's part to broach the subject at the racecourse, as he did. Fletcher swore he would have his revenge.

'Look here, Mr. Marston,' he said, 'you think that horse will win a big stake for you. He'll not. I'll ruin you, if I have to shoot him on the course. Mark my words, the man that rubs me the wrong way goes to the wall. You think you're pretty cute, but you'll find you're no match for "Spider" Fletcher. As for that miserable old skunk you've engaged to take my place, he'll soon find out Caloola isn't worth training, if he knows anything about a horse.'

Ike would have resented this language there and then, but he was restrained by Marston from doing so.

Fletcher left the ground in a very bad temper, and it had not abated when he reached town, as it was pretty well known in sporting circles that Jack Marston had had a row with the 'Spider.'

Ike took charge of Caloola, and horse and man were located at a quiet private stable at Randwick, near the course. He did not work the horse that morning, although Marston wished him to do so. Ike had a will of his own, and he said if he was to train the horse he must do it his own way, and he was of opinion that the fright and the gallop Caloola had on the course a couple of mornings back was quite sufficient for a day or two. Ike also insisted that the jockey Willie—the lad had no other name, that he knew—must live with him at the cottage, and constantly ride the horse in his gallops.

I shall have more to say about Willie anon. At present it will suffice to say that, owing to Jack Marston's kindness, the lad was becoming a first-rate jockey, and, what's more, he was quite respectable.

When Marston reached town, after going home with Ike, and seeing Caloola all right in his box, he went to Tattersall's Club. The first man he met inside the rooms was Kingdon, the bookmaker. He looked somewhat cunning at Jack as he shook hands with him, and said:

'So Caloola's your horse after all, is he, Mr. Marston? You kept it pretty dark, I must say. Blest if everyone didn't think he was in Payten's stable until the other day, when Tom said he'd been sold to a friend of yours. I

don't fancy you've made much of a bargain from all I can hear, and I wouldn't risk much on him if I were you. They don't often sell a good one out of their stable, Mr. Marston. Generally keep all the plums for themselves, and quite right too.'

'So you've made the discovery, eh, Kingdon?' laughed Jack. 'Well, he's been my property for some months now. Seriously speaking, you have a good stake on Caloola, Kingdon. If you've not seen him yet, and I don't think you have, come out with me to Randwick and I'll introduce you to the horse, his new trainer, and the jockey. You see, I've got a ready-made trainer and jockey all complete. Imported the former direct from England.'

'What's become of Fletcher?' said Kingdon.

'Gave him a cheque this morning, and sent him about his business. He doesn't know how to handle the horse, and, what's more, I don't like the man.'

'No more do I, Mr. Marston, but he's a deuced slippery customer, and I hope he'll not be a bad enemy. He can when he likes. I know something about the "Spider's" tricks.'

'Then you ought to congratulate me upon getting rid of such an undesirable acquaintance,' said Marston.

'So I do in one sense; but he'll be even with you if he can,' said Kingdon.

'What price Caloola?' said Marston, turning to a bookmaker who had just entered the room.

'I'll lay you £1000 to £40, Mr. Marston, for the double.'

'Short price that. You can book it, any way.'

'Take my advice, Mr. Marston,' again said Kingdon, 'wait a bit before you put any more on. It's a good while till the Cup Day. Shall you start him before the Melbourne Derby?'

'Probably for our Derby,' said Marston, 'if he goes on all right. But I'll let you know all about that before the time. I shall trust my new trainer implicitly.'

Marston had turned to go down the room, when Kingdon touched him on the shoulder and said, in a hesitating sort of way:

'I forgot I had a message for you, Mr. Marston. You

haven't been up to our house lately, and Edith said I was to tell you she thought you had deserted us.'

Marston stopped and, looking Kingdon straight in the face, said :

'I know I have not been up. I've kept away on purpose. The fact is, Kingdon, I've been at your house a little too often lately. I'd better keep away ; it will be better for me, and perhaps for Edith. I have told you, and I have told Edith, that there is a past in my life I cannot blot out, and that I shall never marry. If there is one woman more than another that I have a respect and admiration for, it is your daughter, Kingdon. Don't tempt me.'

'What must I tell her ?' said Kingdon.

'Tell her I'll come up to-morrow. But for heaven's sake don't have a lot of people up there,' said Marston.

If there was one soft spot in Kingdon's heart it was his love for his daughter, and he would have given all he possessed to make her happy. He knew she loved Jack Marston, and he knew also that her love was probably hopeless.

Edith Kingdon had not been trained in a very good school, but she was a wonderful clever girl, and had not become contaminated with the shady company her father used to keep in his early struggling days.

She was a sensible woman, and knew that Marston was considerably above her in station. Edith Kingdon would not have disgraced any society ; but she knew her position was an invidious one. Her father's occupation necessitated a good deal of company at the house, and the visitors were all of the male sex. She had no mother, and ever since she was sixteen years of age—she was now twenty-three—she had been mistress of her father's house. Screen her as he would, Kingdon could not keep some of his guests from passing somewhat broad compliments, for Edith Kingdon was a beautiful woman. The swells who occasionally visited Kingdon's house thought the bookmaker's daughter was fair game for their admiration. There was one man, however, who ever since he first put foot inside her father's home had always treated her with the utmost respect. That man was Jack Marston. No words of admiration ever passed his lips, but he spoke to her in such a gentle, quiet manner

that her heart beat fast at the tones of his voice. Marston treated her with as much deference as he would have done the Governor's wife.

For the past twelve months he had been a constant visitor at Kingdon's, and Edith had begun to look forward to his appearance as the happiest time of her daily life. She had fallen deeply in love with him, and Marston hardly knew it, although he had some fear of himself, for Edith Kingdon could be very charming when she felt so inclined.

At first he had paid her a good deal of attention, and Edith's hopes had risen accordingly. She loved her father dearly, but she would have been glad to free herself from the associations with which he was surrounded. Instinctively she felt that Marston was a man far superior to the generality of visitors at her father's house.

Lately Marston had not been such a frequent caller, and she was anxious to know the cause. Was he in difficulties? If so, how could she help him? She had an almost unlimited supply of money, for her father never begrudged her anything. But how could she offer it to him without offending him? She knew several of the guests at her father's table were deeply in their host's debt. She also knew that many of them would have accepted money, no matter where it came from. But Marston was different. It was no unwomanly feeling which had prompted Edith Kingdon to ask her father to deliver a message to Jack Marston. She loved him, and her one desire was to get him out of his difficulties if he were in any.

She felt sure he would not accept money from her, but if she could find out if he was in debt, her father could manage the rest without Marston knowing she had a hand in it.

When her father arrived home late that night he found his daughter waiting for him.

'Not in bed yet, Edith?' he said. 'It's time, my girl. You'll lose all the roses on your cheeks,' he continued, as he kissed her fondly.

'Did you deliver my message, father?'

'Yes, Edie, and he'll come up to-morrow.'

He saw her face brighten, and the love light come into her eyes, and he sighed.

'Perhaps I may ask a favour of you to-morrow, dad, which will cost you a great deal of money,' said Edith. 'Promise me you will grant it.'

'Anything in reason, pet. Don't run it into thousands, though,' he said, with a smile. 'By-the-bye, I hear Marston's been hit pretty hard at hazard, but he says it's all right. I only half believe him, though.'

Edith's face blanched. She felt that her fears were confirmed, and that Jack Marston was deeply in debt.

'He doesn't owe you money, father, does he?' she murmured.

'No, Edith. I wish to Heaven he did,' was the unexpected reply.

'Why?' she exclaimed in astonishment.

'For the pleasure of letting him off,' was the answer.

'Oh, you dear old dad!' she said, as she kissed him heartily. 'Good-night, father. Remember your promise;' and with this parting salute she went out of the room.

'Wonder what she wants now?' mused Kingdon. 'Hang it all! why can't Jack Marston marry her? I'm certain they're in love with each other, and d—— it, if it's money he wants, he shall have the run of my banker.'

CHAPTER VIII.

EDITH KINGDON.

SHORTLY before six o'clock a hansom rattled along the Randwick Road, and turned into the drive leading to a fine, well-built house.

This was Kingdon's residence, and the cab contained Jack Marston.

It was quite evident, at all events from outward appearances, that the 'leviathan' was a wealthy man.

His house—mansion would be a more correct term—was one of the best in the suburbs of Sydney. It stood in about five acres of ground. The front lawn was laid out in the latest Continental style, and the grass and the numerous slopes were brilliantly green. Numerous glass-houses and conservatories were attached to the main building, and at

the rear were some excellent stables and loose-boxes, for Kingdon, like many of his class, loved to own a horse or two, although they often cost him dear.

Edith Kingdon had seen the hansom drive up, and saw who was inside, and she blushed a rosy red and her heart fluttered excitedly.

Jack Marston sprang out of the cab and went up the steps, telling the driver to call for him again at night.

In another minute he was in the superbly-furnished drawing-room of Kingdon's house, shaking hands with the woman who loved him so well.

Jack Marston felt a peculiar thrill run through his frame as he touched the small white hand. It was so soft and warm, and had such a gentle pressure with it. He looked at her, and thought what a lovely woman she was. He felt he must screw his courage to the 'sticking point,' or else he would fall head over ears in love. Did he but know it, he was very far gone already.

Edith Kingdon greeted him with her bright, cheery smile, and bade him welcome to Hawk's Nest, the peculiar name of the house.

'You are quite a stranger, Mr. Marston. What have you been doing with yourself? Some attraction, I suppose,' she said, with a pretty pout.

'You know very well, Miss Kingdon, I have no attractions excepting the dice-box and the noble animal,' laughed Marston.

'Ah, how I wish you would leave it all alone, Mr. Marston!' she said earnestly. 'It ruins many a good man, and I know a great deal about it. Promise me you will give up the dice, at any rate.'

'The dice have given me up, I think, Miss Kingdon. I have sworn off. No, don't praise me,' he said, as she gave an approving nod of her head; 'I really don't deserve it. The necessary cash, which, perhaps you are aware, is an essential commodity to carry on the game, has deserted me. I am about cleared out, to use a common expression, and I have but one chance of recouping myself.'

'And what is that?' she said.

'Woman's curiosity. Well, I suppose you must know.

You have been very kind to me,' said Marston, 'more like a sister' (she winced at these words), 'and I know I can trust you. I have a horse called Caloola, and I am backing him to win the Melbourne Derby and Cup for a fortune. If it comes off I am right. If not—well, I shall be able to pay all my debts; and then I must turn my hand to something, I suppose. I've been idle long enough; I am tired of living on my wits, as it were, and this last *coup* will either kill or cure me.'

'Father thinks you have not much chance with Caloola,' she said. 'I do hope he will win, Mr. Marston; I do indeed. How I should like to see him!' she said.

'So you shall, Miss Kingdon, if I have to bring him out on the lawn,' said Jack. 'If he wins the Blue Ribbon you shall place it round his neck, Governor's wife or no Governor's wife present.'

Edith's eyes sparkled with pleasure.

'Do you really mean that?' she said. 'How good of you! Mind, I shall hold you to your promise. I do hope he will win.'

'Not more than I do,' said Jack.

'Oh yes, I do. It will get you out of difficulty, and that would please me more than anything else in the world,' she said; and the tell-tale blood came into her face, for she had unwittingly betrayed how great an interest she had in him.

Marston saw it. The thought flashed over him in a moment how deeply this woman loved him. The tide was at the flood, and he was battling against it. Another moment and it would have whirled him into a very vortex of love. He exercised a powerful self-control over himself, but for a minute or so he could not venture to speak. When he did it was with hesitation, only too apparent. He took Edith's hand and led her to the sofa. They both sat down.

'Miss Kingdon,' he said, 'I have something I must say to you.'

She looked down and murmured:

'What is it?'

'I am afraid there is danger in my coming to your father's house,' he said.

'Oh, no, no!' she exclaimed. 'No one dare touch you here.'

'It is not that I am afraid of anyone who comes here,' said Jack. 'I am afraid of someone who lives here.'

'Not my father?' she said.

'He is one of my best friends. It is not your father I am afraid of, Miss Kingdon, it is you,' he said.

'And why are you afraid of me?' she said, almost in a whisper.

'Because I—— Oh! Edith, it's no use. I must say it, be the consequences what they may. I love you, Edith, and that is why there is danger.'

'Jack!' she murmured.

Marston could resist no longer. He took her in his arms and kissed her.

Edith Kingdon had never felt so happy before She loved and she was beloved. What more could she want?

After some minutes of blissful silence Marston spoke.

'We love each other, Edith, and I am proud of your love; but where will it lead us? I cannot marry you, Edith, in my present circumstances.'

'But I have enough for us both,' she said.

'And do you think I could accept that?' said Jack. 'No, my generous girl, I must be able to give you a suitable settlement when we marry, if ever the time comes; and I mean to do it with Caloola's winnings.'

'Oh! Jack, that's a very remote chance,' she said. 'How I love that dear horse. I must see him, Jack.'

'I have something more to tell you, Edith,' he said, with a grave face. 'Five years ago I loved a girl deeply, fondly. She left me; ran away with another man just before we were to have been married. He deserted her, and she died of a broken heart.'

'Poor Jack!' she murmured.

Her whole thought was for the man she loved, not the woman who had wronged him.

When Kingdon came in at seven o'clock he saw by his daughter's face that something had happened. She looked radiant, and more beautiful than he ever thought she had done before.

'Edith, you look pleased,' he said. 'Has Mr. Marston come?'

'Yes, father,' she said with a blush. 'He wants to speak to you.'

Kingdon looked at her, and then thought, 'Can he have asked her? I hope he has. He shan't repent it, by heaven!'

He went into the drawing-room, and Jack Marston advanced to meet him.

'Kingdon,' he said, as he took his hand, 'I've asked your daughter to marry me. She has consented. We both love each other dearly. Stop,' he said, as Kingdon was about to speak. 'I must explain: I am about at the end of my tether, and if Caloola doesn't win the double I'm a "broker." I cannot take your daughter to a miserable home. We must risk our marriage on the horse. It's a big weight for him to carry, but I think he'll get home.'

'That need make no difference, Mr. Marston,' said Kingdon. 'You've made me a happy man, Jack; I suppose I may call you that now. I've known Edith loved you for months past. I love my daughter, and I would not give her to any other man with half the pleasure I do to you. As for money, that need not trouble you. Edith is my only child, and she will have plenty.'

'I could not accept it, Kingdon,' said Jack. 'I must make a pile. I love Edith, and I hope some day to give her the position she would fill so well. I come of an old stock, and I am proud to have such a woman for my future wife.'

Kingdon's eyes glistened. He said:

'I'm not a thorough-paced gentleman, Jack, and I've had my ups and downs in life; but I've given Edith the best education money could bring, and she's a credit to her teacher. She has none of our fast-set manners, and I am sure you will love her for herself. You can easily shelve the old man,' he said with a sigh.

'Never, Kingdon. I'll never turn my back on my wife's father. You may not be born in the purple, but you've the heart of a true gentleman. Give me your hand, Kingdon. We all sail in the same boat from to-day.'

Dinner passed off pleasantly, and a happier trio than

Kingdon, Edith and Jack Marston it would have been difficult to find.

'Anyone coming up to-night, father?' Edith said.

'Yes, I expect Mr. Sherwin, and he's bringing Lord Mayfield with him.'

'Who's he?' said Jack.

'A new arrival, I believe. Come out here for the benefit of his health. Rolling in wealth, and desirous of doing a little on the turf,' was the reply.

'Why did you ask him here, father?' said Edith.

'I didn't do so; Sherwin said he should bring him, so I could not very well refuse.'

About nine o'clock Sherwin and Lord Mayfield arrived. The former was a well-known gentleman backer, and a good amateur rider. Lal Sherwin, some people said, did not object to winning a few hundreds from a rich young swell, and it was also whispered he sometimes did not ride quite straight. But Lal was an amateur and a gentleman, and consequently these surmises must have been wrong.

Lord Mayfield was a young sprig of English nobility, just out of his minority. A pale, delicate, insipid-looking youth, with a drawl and an insolent air to people he considered his inferiors. As he generally considered anyone he met an inferior, it can be clearly understood that he was not a boon companion. He rolled in wealth, and spent it freely.

Sherwin introduced his lordship to the company, and the condescending manner in which he touched Marston's hand, and the bold glance he gave Edith, made Jack's pulse beat, and his fingers tingle to get hold of him and put him outside the door. He was, however, studiously polite, as the stripling was for the time being Kingdon's guest.

Edith retired at eleven o'clock, and as Jack opened the door for her, she said:

'Remember your promise. Don't play cards or dice with them, Jack.'

'I promise you, dearest, if it will make you sleep better,' he said. 'Good-night, Edith. Heaven bless you.'

He shut the door and came back to the three men.

'Let's adjourn to your sanctum, Kingdon, it's a d——d sight more cosy than this room,' said Sherwin.

They went, and, as might have been expected, over the wine and cigars a game at hazard was proposed.

'Won't you join us, Marston?' said Sherwin.

'No, thanks; I'll watch the game. Hazard and I don't agree very well,' he laughed.

'All right, old man. Come on, Kingdon. You'll join us, Lord Mayfield?'

'Certainly,' he drawled. 'By Jove, splendid place you've got here, Kingdon. Nice girl your daughter, too. Hope we shall be good friends.'

Marston felt inclined to kick the dandy. They commenced to play, and Lord Mayfield won a considerable stake. The luck, however, turned, and at one in the morning he had lost some hundreds of pounds. His temper did not improve with this, and he played recklessly. In another hour he had lost five hundred pounds.

Lord Mayfield yawned and said he must be going.

'All right,' said Sherwin; 'one more throw.'

Sherwin won a hundred, and they rose to go. Marston declined Kingdon's invitation to stay the night, as he said his cab was outside.

Kingdon let them out at the door, and wished them good-night.

'Why don't you play, Marston?' drawled Lord Mayfield.

'I have had about enough of it,' said Jack. 'Besides, I have promised to have no more dealings with dice or cards until after the Melbourne Cup, at any rate.'

'Oh, indeed, sudden turn of virtue, I suppose. You looked pretty sweet on that Kingdon girl. She's not half bad. Must have a flirtation with her myself. Bookmaker's daughter. Fair game, you know,' said Lord Mayfield.

'That Kingdon girl, as you call her, is my affianced wife,' said Marston. 'Let me hear you say a word against her, a speech to her other than in a proper manner, and I'll settle my little account with you. I don't choose to have people meddling in my affairs, do I, Sherwin?'

'No, by G—, you don't,' said Sherwin.

Lord Mayfield looked quite taken aback, but he said:

''Pon my honour, most romantic. All's fair in love and war, though. Ta-ta,' he lisped, as he got into the cab with Sherwin.

'Good-night, Marston,' said the latter.

Jack Marston did not answer. He got into his cab in no very amiable frame of mind, and if Lord Mayfield could have read his thoughts, as he drove to his hotel, he would have felt uncomfortable.

Luckily for his peace of mind he did not know, and he said to Sherwin:

'Hot-headed beggar, that fellow Marston. Sweet on the Kingdon girl, by Jove! I must cut him out there.'

'I'd advise you to let him alone, and her too,' said Sherwin. 'Jack Marston's horsewhipped men for less than you've said to-night.'

'Horsewhipped!' he said; 'two can play at that game.'

Sherwin looked at the insipid young man by his side and smiled. He thought he knew how his lordship would fare in an encounter with Jack Marston. He chuckled at the thought of it, and vowed it would be better than a knock-out at Foley's, only he fancied there would only be one round.

Lord Mayfield boasted of two playing at horsewhipping, but inwardly he had a sinking kind of feeling at the mere thought of a personal encounter with Marston.

He had a bad dream that night, in which an infuriated man, very like Jack Marston, appeared on the scene with a very heavy hunting-whip, and he awoke with a start as he fancied he felt the first stroke on his legs.

He could not sleep again, and lay awake thinking that perhaps he was wrong, and, after all, Marston might be a real good fellow.

'D—— it! if I'd known the girl was his intended, I'd not have made an ass of myself,' he muttered. 'I'll make friends with him next time we meet. Too much trouble having enemies.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE 'SPIDER'S WEB.'

FLETCHER was in a terrible rage over his dismissal as Marston's trainer, and he swore dreadful oaths he would be revenged upon his late master, Ike Thurton, and all con-

nected with him. He was a man who would not stick at a trifle to gain his ends. Fletcher's career had been shocking. He was an outcast from his birth. He never knew what it was to have a father or mother's care. From his earliest years he had been connected with racing stables, as cleaner, jockey, and trainer. He had by dint of perseverance worked his way up in the world, or rather his world, for he lived in an atmosphere tainted with duplicity, and had been taught that to get the better of his fellows was the great object in life. An exceedingly suspicious death had occurred at Fletcher's house, and one or two people who knew full particulars shook their heads when questioned upon the matter, as though they could give some startling evidence if they felt so inclined.

Fletcher was a sharper in every sense of the word. At the time of which I write, he had a house at Redfern, which bore a very bad name, and was known amongst the fraternity as the 'Spider's Web.' Many a young fellow, anxious to acquire a knowledge of racing, and become acquainted with a real live trainer, had found his way into this 'Web,' and in a few weeks had been sucked dry by the voracious 'spider' and his friends. I am afraid sundry embezzlements from banks and elsewhere could have been traced to losses incurred at Fletcher's. He was a stern mentor, and exacted his uttermost pound of flesh for all the information he gave. Many a promising young life had been ruined by visiting the 'Spider's Web,' and many a young wife had cause to regret the day her husband entered his retreat. All were fish that came into Fletcher's net. However small, he did not mind; so long as he could get something out of them he was satisfied.

Fletcher was not a married man, but passed as such, and 'Mrs.' Fletcher was a pretty, dashing, fast woman, and by her coquetries and fascinations attracted a good many 'moths around the flame.' She entered thoroughly into all Fletcher's plans, and aided his designs to the best of her ability. The pair made a considerable amount of money between them.

It must not be supposed that the 'Spider's Web' was frequented by the lowest of the low. Far from it. The class of men who came to the house were, as a rule, con-

siderably more respectable than their host. The fact of the matter is the 'Spider's Web' was a kind of private gambling hell, and this made it a frequent place of call for the numerous men in Sydney who wished to be thought fast. It is surprising what a man will do in order to meet on terms of familiarity some well-known trainer or jockey.

I have watched them on the racecourse with much amusement. If they get a friendly nod from a trainer they are as proud as peacocks, and look round to see if their friends had noticed the condescension. To speak to a jockey in the paddock is their delight, and although the conversation may have been greatly upon ordinary matters, they tell their friends that so and so gave them the 'straight tip.'

A few nights after Fletcher had received his *congé* from Jack Marston, a small party had assembled at the 'Spider's Web.' Amongst them might be noticed Lord Mayfield and Sherwin. A well-known jockey, 'Pusher' Wells, was present. He had been nick-named 'Pusher' on account of a peculiar knack he had of getting a horse's head in front in a fine finish, and by a supreme effort winning on the post.

Lord Mayfield had admired Mrs. Fletcher immensely, and had flirted desperately with her during the evening. The lady was nothing loath. She had never experienced the sensation of being made love to by a real lord before, and she rather liked it. She saw a vision of regal splendour in which she was the conspicuous figure. Diamonds, and an unlimited amount of dresses, she felt to be within her grasp. Daisy Fletcher, as she was called, would have thrown her present protector over without the least compunction if she saw a chance of getting a better. She was fully aware that she possessed considerable influence over Fletcher, and, as she put it, could 'twist him round her little finger.' The man treated her well. He never bullied her, and this was strange, considering he generally behaved in a decidedly antagonistic manner to most people. He was a little bit afraid of Daisy, the reason being that he was as fond of her as his selfish nature would allow.

She had a temper of her own, and on more than one occasion had she shown Fletcher pretty plainly she was not a woman to be trifled with. Besides, she was useful to him.

It suited him to have a dashing, fine woman as mistress of his house.

Lord Mayfield had seen Daisy Fletcher for the first time on this occasion, and she had been as amiable and fascinating as she knew how. He was very susceptible, and this free and easy woman pleased him. He fancied she must have fallen in love with him on the spot, for a more conceited man than Lord Mayfield did not exist.

Daisy had fallen in love, but it was not with the man. It was the title and the wealth that she longed for. She knew that as the 'wife' of Fletcher she would be all the more attractive to this sprig of nobility. If a man can get a woman he wants without much trouble, she has not half the fascination for him that she possesses if he knows she belongs legally to somebody else. 'Stolen kisses' are the sweetest, and a good many men, I am sorry to say, do not seem at all averse if their kisses are stolen from their friend's wife.

Lord Mayfield was just the man to fall into the trap Daisy Fletcher had determined to lay for him. Her great fear was that if Fletcher saw the game she was playing he would, in a fit of passion, spoil it all by telling Lord Mayfield she was not his wife.

Her ambition took a higher flight on this occasion than it had ever done before. She meant to inveigle Lord Mayfield into a marriage if possible. She was no ill-bred, ignorant woman. Daisy Fletcher had received a good education, but a false step in life had made her what she was. Perhaps it was not altogether her fault in the first instance. She had been a gay, thoughtless girl, and had been taken advantage of before she well knew the consequences of her folly. When she did find it out she took another false step, and so plunged deeper into the mire. Sometimes she felt sick of her present life, and thought if she got a chance she would quit it for ever. She fancied she saw that chance now—remote though it might be.

Fletcher saw how she smiled at Lord Mayfield, but he thought it was merely another clever move on her part in order to attract the young man to the house, and he chuckled to himself and said: 'I'll manage the rest. I'll drain you out pretty clean, my lord, if you come here often enough!'

The jockey Wells was another who had fallen a prey to

the seductive beauty of Daisy Fletcher, and he would have sold his best friend had she so desired it. He, too, saw the progress Lord Mayfield was making in that quarter, and he ground his teeth as he thought of the social difference there was between them.

The men had all retired to the card-room, and Lord Mayfield and Daisy Fletcher were left alone.

The champagne had flowed freely at dinner, and Lord Mayfield had taken one or two glasses more than his weak head could well stand. He felt amorously inclined, and Daisy's beauty seemed enhanced a hundredfold in his eyes. He came and sat on the sofa at her side, and looked at her as though he would have given all he possessed to have her for his own.

He yielded to the intoxication of the moment, and put his arm around her waist.

She repulsed him, and moved further away, saying, 'Lord Mayfield, you forget yourself.'

''Pon my soul, I meant no harm, Mrs. Fletcher. You are so charming. Really, I did not mean to offend you. Don't go away. It must have been the champagne.'

'If it's the champagne, Lord Mayfield, then I will pardon you,' she said, with a light laugh, as she resumed her seat.

Champagne or no champagne, it was quite evident something had roused his lordship considerably, and given him an amount of 'Dutch courage' he did not often possess. He made ardent love to his fair hostess, and told her he considered Fletcher the luckiest beggar alive to possess so charming a wife. Matters were rapidly reaching a climax when Sherwin looked in at the door and asked if Lord Mayfield would not join the party at the card-table.

Daisy Fletcher thought her admirer had gone far enough for one night, and on such a short acquaintance, so she rose from the sofa and said it was time she retired. His lordship protested. He hated cards and dice. He abhorred gambling in all shapes and forms, and would much rather talk to so charming a lady.

She accepted his protestations readily, but remained obdurate, and declined to stay longer with him. She, however, said, as she wished him good-night, 'I hope you will

call again, Lord Mayfield. I am always at home in the afternoon, and am generally alone and bored to death. Perhaps you could spare a few hours occasionally to endeavour to enliven the monotony of my existence.' She gave him a swift passionate glance, and it made Lord Mayfield's pulses tingle; and he vowed he would call at the 'Spider's Web' the next afternoon.

In the card-room that night there was some high play. Wells, the jockey, had seen Lord Mayfield's flirtation with Mrs. Fletcher, and he was determined to have his revenge if possible. For a wonder, they were playing 'Nap;' and from a shilling it had gradually risen to a 'sovereign.' Fletcher was an adept at dealing cards, and Sherwin was nearly as clever. Sherwin played straight when he had straight men to deal with, but the 'gentleman' rider often gave it as his opinion that it was just as well to be acquainted with all the moves on the board, because 'I never know what company I may find myself in.' Lord Mayfield lost a hundred that night, but he was rather pleased, as it put Fletcher in a good humour; and, as the reader is aware, he had his reasons for wishing to gain a firm footing in the house. Cards were thrown down, and over the whisky conversation became brisk. What with champagne, Daisy Fletcher, cards and whisky, Lord Mayfield was becoming somewhat muddled.

Sherwin happened to allude to their visit to Kingdon's, and chaffed Mayfield about being smitten with Edith.

It was an unlucky shot. Lord Mayfield fired up and called Miss Kingdon a d—— stuck-up iceberg, and then assailed Jack Marston, winding up by saying he was a prig and a blackguard.

Fletcher coincided in his opinion. 'I owe him a grudge,' he said, 'and I'd like to pay him out. I will, too, if it costs me all I'm worth. The best way to strike him is through his horse, Caloola. He's mighty sweet on that brute. I tell him the beast's no good, but by —— when he does gallop, and his temper's right, he's the fastest horse I ever trained.'

'You always said he was a second-rater,' said Wells. 'I'm glad to hear you have such a good opinion of him, for Mr. Marston has retained me to ride him in the Derby,

and, if he wins that, the Cup, for I can get the weight then.'

Fletcher pricked up his ears at this. He thought he saw a very easy way of getting at Jack Marston's horse, and without any unpleasant consequences to himself.

'I'd give a thousand pounds to see his horse beaten,' said Lord Mayfield. 'How I do hate the fellow, though I hardly know why.'

Sherwin thought, 'But I know Marston is worth fifty such men as Mayfield. What game are they up to?' he wondered.

'When did Marston ask you to ride Caloola, and what's the figure?' said Fletcher.

'As soon as he bought the horse he asked me, and he promised me five hundred if I win the Derby on him, and two thousand if I land the double. It's a big lump, but everybody knows Marston's a man of his word. I'm to get a hundred for the mount in the Derby, win or lose.'

'That's just like Marston,' said Sherwin. 'He's the most generous fellow I know. Hang it all, he laid me two hundred to nothing when I rode Warrior in the Hurdles for him, and I know he didn't win above five or six hundred beside the stake.'

'Generous be hanged!' said Fletcher. 'A man can afford to be free with other people's money.'

'What do you mean?' said Sherwin.

'Mean! Why, he is in debt up to his eyes. He owes a heap of money. If he goes this time he'll be a defaulter.'

'Don't you believe it,' said Sherwin. 'He's not like you, Fletcher; he pays when he's got it, and never bets beyond his means.'

'Curse you, who says I don't pay?' growled Fletcher.

'I do,' coolly replied Sherwin. 'I'd very much like that hundred you owe me on Warrior.

'You'll never get that,' said Fletcher; 'you sold me over that race. You told me the horse had no show.'

'I didn't think he had,' said Sherwin; 'but after the first half mile I fancied it was a good thing, and even your loss of a century, my dear boy, couldn't stop me winning.'

'D—— you, I believe you knew it was a good thing all the time,' was the reply. 'I say, "Pusher," have some

more whisky. Drink up, my lord; we must have a parting glass.' Round went the bottle and down went the whisky.

'Well,' said Lord Mayfield, 'I'll give you a thousand not to ride Marston's horse, on condition you don't let him know until it's too late to get another jockey.'

Now, a thousand pounds for a certainty was a tempting bait for the 'Pusher,' whose great fault was an inordinate love of money. He had, however, a dull sense of honour in him, and he replied:

'No, thanks, your lordship. It's tempting for a poor man, but I can't serve Mr. Marston a shabby trick like that. He's always behaved well to me, and I won't go back on him. Besides, he'd break every bone in my body before I could get out of his reach. He's a tiger when he's roused. Don't you meddle with his affairs, Lord Mayfield.'

'I wish somebody would make me an offer like that,' said Fletcher. 'I'd jump at it; in fact, I'd do it for nothing to pay that fellow out.'

'I've no doubt you would, my amiable friend,' said Sherwin. 'But you won't get the chance. If anyone plays Marston false I'll split, for I shall know where the danger comes from. I knew Wells would not accept your offer. I'm surprised you made it, Lord Mayfield.'

'I don't see anything wrong about it,' said Mayfield. 'If I choose to give Wells a thousand, and he declines to ride Marston's horse, there is no great harm done.'

'Yes, there is, when he can't get another decent jockey,' said Sherwin.

'Don't fear me, Mr. Sherwin,' said Wells; 'I am not going to play Mr. Marston a dirty trick for any man.'

'You might for a woman,' thought Fletcher, for he knew the power Daisy had over the jockey.

'Marston's awfully spoony on Kingdon's lass,' said Fletcher.

'Should rather think he was,' said Lord Mayfield; 'they're engaged to be married. He told me so himself.'

'That's the little game, is it?' sneered Fletcher; 'patching up his broken fortune by marrying a rich bookmaker's daughter. He's mean enough for that.'

'You're barking up the wrong tree, Fletcher,' said Sherwin. 'Kingdon will be mighty glad to see his daughter

married to such a man as Jack Marston. He's a lucky dog to get the girl. Edith Kingdon's one in a thousand.'

'She's like all the rest,' lisped Lord Mayfield. 'I'd make her spoon on me in a week if I liked.'

Sherwin nearly exploded at this conceited remark, but he controlled his feelings, and merely smiled.

'It's my belief Kingdon uses her to attract men to the house,' said Fletcher.

'That's a lie, and you know it,' said Sherwin.

'Don't speak to me like that,' roared Fletcher, 'or I'll smash this bottle on you.' He took up the decanter and looked so terribly in earnest that Lord Mayfield started up from his seat.

''Pon my soul, Sherwin, that's too bad,' he said. 'Don't quarrel, for heaven's sake. You'll wake Mrs. Fletcher, and disturb the whole place.'

Peace was restored, and after sundry more libations Lord Mayfield and Sherwin left, the former being resolved to see more of Fletcher as soon as possible.

As Wells was about to go Fletcher said:

'Look here, "Pusher," I've a grudge against Marston, and I want you to help me. Daisy also has a set on him, because he insulted her once by making love to her, and you know what that means.'

'Did he do that?' said Wells.

'True as gospel,' said Fletcher; 'ask her yourself.'

'I will,' was the laconic reply.

'That's fetched him,' muttered Fletcher as he shut the door. 'What a lot of d——d fools they are! If I wasn't sure of Daisy I'd make some of them clear out pretty quick. She's fond of me, though, and I can trust her. If we were married it would be different. I believe she'd jilt me, then; but as things are she'll stick to me through thick and thin. She's got that fool Mayfield fast right enough. She played her cards splendidly to-night. By gad, she did it so well she nearly made me jealous. Daisy'd make a darned good actress; she's mistaken her calling.'

And he laughed to himself as he thought how well she could sham love-making. Had he known what Daisy's thoughts were he might have done something desperate. Luckily for both of them, he did not know.

CHAPTER X.

A CLINKING TRIAL.

IKE THURTON spent most of his time with Caloola and the boy Willie. As my readers are aware, Ike was not particularly fond of company, and it was no act of self-denial on his part to remain away from the city. He was rarely seen in Sydney, but his figure had become familiar at Randwick in the early morning. The way in which he handled Caloola surprised most of the trainers, for Ike had managed to curb in some measure his fiery spirit. It was as Ike had said. The horse had never forgotten the grip he had on the bridle the morning Caloola bolted on the course. He worked the horse steadily, and did not bustle him, and the noble creature evidently preferred his new trainer to the old one. Kingdon had persuaded Marston to have the horse removed to his stables. At first Jack had been obstinate, and refused to take advantage of the offer; but when Edith Kingdon pleaded for the chestnut to be located at Hawk's Nest he consented. Ike Thurton also thought it would be better to have his charge at Kingdon's stables, because he did not like to be lonely, not that Fletcher had shown signs of animosity. It took Ike all his time to keep his hands off Fletcher on the racecourse, for the man insulted him whenever he had an opportunity. Ike smothered his wrath, and determined to bide his time, but he meant to have it out with him all the same. Kingdon had three good horses in his stable, and these also were placed under Thurton's care. One of them, Firefly, had won the Sydney Cup, and was considered a real clinker over any distance from one to two miles. Matchboy and Spark were also useful horses, and the former could do seven furlongs in fast time.

Caloola was in very fair condition, but Ike did not want to wind him up at present. Still, he thought he would like to have some idea of what the horse could do over the Derby distance. He knew that in Firefly and Matchboy he had a couple of excellent trial horses, and he was determined to give them a gallop if Marston and Kingdon were agreeable. Marston, when consulted, thought it was rather

early to give the horse a trial; but Kingdon agreed with Ike that it was quite time they discovered what sort of stuff he was made off, and if his heart was in the right place. The horse had been backed by Kingdon for a lot of money, and he had taken back the big wager he had laid Marston, although he accepted the reduced odds.

It was accordingly agreed that a trial should take place, and it was decided to run it in this wise:

Caloola was to be ridden by Willie, and to carry 8 st., or 10 lb. less than his Derby weight; and considering it was the second week in August, and he had only just got into his third year, that was considered a great test as to what he would be able to accomplish in November. Firefly was to have 9 st. up, and Matchboy, with 7 st. 7 lb., was to pick the pair up for the last three-quarters of a mile, and bring them along as fast as the flyer knew how.

Ike said he would ride Firefly himself, so that there would be no doubt about it, and Kingdon's jockey Allan was to have the mount on Matchboy.

Marston was anxious that Wells should ride Caloola in the trial, but Ike was dead against this, and so was Kingdon.

'Wells is a bit too intimate with Fletcher for my fancy,' Kingdon said, 'and I would not trust him over-much. I know he's about as good a jockey as you can get, and I believe he'll ride straight as you have made it worth his while. Still, if we could get another as good, I should be inclined to let him ride for the Derby and Cup mounts.'

'Can't be done,' said Marston. 'Wells may be a bit shady, but I think he'll ride straight. I like his style. He has got a head as well as hands, and I never saw a better judge of pace."

'From what I have seen of Wells,' said Ike, 'I think he would not do Mr. Marston a bad turn. I'm a pretty good judge of character, and Wells is a bit of a queer customer, but he's all right with us, I believe. I would not let him ride in the trial, for he can't keep his tongue still as well as the lads.'

It was a fine, crisp morning, one of the off days on the course, when the small party from Kingdon's house came on to the green springy turf. There were very few horses on the track, most of them having done their work and gone

home, and the touts, not thinking there would be anything worth seeing, had not turned out.

All was got ready. The weights were fixed up right, and the jockeys in the saddles. Caloola appeared a trifle restless, and evidently knew there was something in the wind.

'Looks as if he'd bolt again,' said Marston to Kingdon, and the latter nodded assent.

Ike sat Firefly like a thorough horseman, and although he was getting on in years, it was evident he had lost none of his cunning in the saddle. Allan was thoroughly at home on Matchboy, a horse he had steered to victory in more than one fast-run sprint race, a Royal Stakes to wit.

As the three horses went on to the track they looked perfect pictures. True, Caloola was a shade on the big side, but he was a very different animal from the horse Fletcher had a couple of months back.

'Looks well, don't he?' said Kingdon. 'That fellow Thurton can train a horse as well as any man I've seen.'

'Oh, he knows his business thoroughly,' said Marston, 'and that he also knows how to ride you'll see when they start.'

By the time the trio had cantered gently down to the starting-post for the mile and a half spin, Caloola and Firefly turned and went back a couple of hundred yards, and Matchboy went on to the half distance, where Allan waited with him until the others should get up.

'They're off!' said Marston, as Ike went slightly ahead at a rare pace with Firefly. 'It takes Willie all his time to hold that brute,' said Marston again; 'look how he's pulling him out of the saddle;' and he handed the glasses to Kingdon.

'By Jove! he gallops well,' was the reply; 'Willie's got a firm hold of him now, and he's settling down into his stride nicely. What a stride it is, too! Gad, he's a clinker,' said Kingdon enthusiastically.

Caloola crept closer and closer up to Firefly's girths, and Ike had to drive the horse along to keep the pace hot.

'If they go at that rate, Matchboy 'll lose 'em,' said Kingdon; 'they can never live with him in such a finish over six furlongs.'

'If Caloola gets within ten lengths of your flier at the finish I shall be satisfied,' said Marston.

'I should think you would, considering Matchboy has half a stone the better of the weights.'

The two horses were now nearing Matchboy, and Allan was making ready for a race. A few more seconds and he went off with a clear lead at a terrible pace. Caloola saw what was ahead of him and away he went like the wind. Willie had never even roused him as yet. Firefly struggled, but it was easy to see the weight was telling. Ike gave him a reminder, and he responded, and rapidly gained on the front horses. Round the home turn came Matchboy with a three-lengths lead of Caloola.

'What a pace!' said Marston and Kingdon in a breath.

'How the devil Caloola can last like that is a wonder,' said Kingdon.

The thunder of their hoofs could now be heard. Allan raised his whip at the distance and gave Matchboy a cut. Willie sat as still as a mouse on Caloola.

'Why on earth don't he rouse him up a bit?' said Marston.

'Let him alone, he's riding a great race, that lad is,' said Kingdon.

Caloola's giant strides began to tell, and he gradually gained on Matchboy. Now Willie raised his whip-hand and struck the horse twice. He never flinched for an instant, or swerved from the cut, but seemed to clench his teeth on the bit as if in a rage, and shot to the front before Allan had time to think what had happened. As they passed the box Caloola led by nearly a length, and Firefly came in slowly, Ike having eased him off.

'What a clinking trial!' said Kingdon. 'It's the best I ever saw on this course. We're in for a real good thing, Marston. The Derby and Cup look almost a certainty, bar accidents, after that.'

'Yes, it was a great trial,' said Marston. 'If Caloola will race like that with the colours up, we need not fear anything in the Derby, at any rate. Well, Ike, what did you think of it?' he said as Thurton dropped out of the saddle.

'Didn't think he had it in him,' said Ike.

'No more did I,' said Kingdon.

'He's a scorcher, that's what he is, Mr. Marston. I know what Firefly can do, and Caloola had his measure from the jump. That did not surprise me so much as the finish with Matchboy. My calculations are all out. I thought Matchboy would win, but not easily. Caloola's a much better horse than I thought him, and I have always had a good opinion of him.'

'How did he finish, Willie?' said Ike.

'Game as a lion, sir. I never hit him till just at the last pinch, and he didn't flinch at all. He wanted to bolt once or twice, but I mastered him.'

Allan said he got all he could out of Matchboy, so there could be no doubt about the trial being true.

'Very few people saw it,' said Kingdon, 'and those that did will probably fancy Caloola had a very light weight up. Still, if the news gets about he'll be backed on the strength of it, more especially as it is pretty well known Wells will ride.'

The result of the trial, as might have been expected, put the party in a good humour, and when they were at breakfast at Kingdon's house, Edith was told of the great feat Caloola had performed.

'He's bound to win,' said her father, 'and then—well, you know what will happen.'

Edith blushed, and Marston said, 'It will be the happiest day in my life when Caloola wins. It's not the money I want, I don't care so much about that, although it will be useful enough. You know what a big stake I have on, Edith. If Caloola knew what he could win for me, I believe he'd gallop his heart out. The horse seems to have taken a great fancy to you, Edith. Ike tells me he'll eat out of your hand, and let you caress him in his box as quiet as a lamb. I must say he's a very sensible horse, and has an eye for beauty and personal attractions.'

'No flattery, sir, if you please,' laughed Edith. 'Caloola has taken a great liking to me, and we have had several confidential chats together. He seems to understand all I say to him, too.'

'I hope you don't put him up to any nonsense, then,' said Kingdon.

'Oh dear no, father. Caloola and I have a secret understanding, but we shall not divulge it by any means.'

'Give him good advice, Edith,' said Marston. 'You had better not tell him all our secrets, however, or he might let them out.'

'Come, and I will show you how well we agree,' she said.

They went round to the stables, where Caloola was luxuriating in clean straw knee-deep, and looking none the worse for his hard gallop. Ike touched his hat as the young lady came forward and said, 'He'll be glad to see you, Miss Kingdon. He's a sensible horse, is Caloola,' went on Ike, with a look of admiration at the graceful girl before him.

'I am afraid Mr. Marston has been teaching you how to flatter,' she said. 'I thought better of you than to pass compliments.'

'I never pay compliments,' said Ike. 'It's the truth, miss.'

'There, you've made it worse,' said Jack. 'That was the biggest compliment of the lot.'

Caloola turned his head and whinnied as Edith stepped into his box without the slightest fear. She patted his sleek coat, saying:

'Dear old boy, you did a grand gallop this morning and must be rewarded. Give me a carrot, Ike!'

She gave the horse the dainty morsel, and he crunched it with satisfaction and then rubbed his velvety nose against the little white hand held out to him. She patted his neck, and then put her arm round it, and laid her beautiful cheek against Caloola's. The horse never stirred. The wild, savage Caloola of that runaway gallop when Willie was nearly killed had disappeared. The tearaway of that morning, the hero of the trial, had suddenly developed into a mild, affectionate creature to be fondled by a lady.

She called the horse by name, and he followed her to the door of the box.

'Go back like a good boy,' she said. Caloola looked at her with his big wistful eyes, and put out his nose to be rubbed again. 'You have had quite enough petting for one morning,' she said; 'turn round, sir,' and she waved her hand in the direction of the manger.

Caloola tossed up his head, gave a little short, and whirled round. He dived his nose into the corn, and then turned round his head to see if the coast was clear.

Kingdon had just stepped inside the box, and was examining him carefully, when, without the least warning, Caloola lashed out behind, and made him skip towards the door in an undignified manner.

Edith laughed heartily, and said, 'He doesn't like you, father, at present.'

'No one can manage him like Miss Kingdon,' said Ike. 'He's just the same with all of us. You never know when you have got him safe.'

'You must be careful, Edith,' said Jack Marston; 'a horse like that can never be depended upon. I don't think it is very wise of you to go into his box like that, although he does seem quiet with you.'

'He'll never hurt her, Mr. Marston,' said Ike. 'I know what horses are. Caloola would know Miss Kingdon's voice if she went into his box at dead of night, and if he was lying down he'd never stir.'

'You won't get me in his box again in a hurry,' said Kingdon.

'Shall we back him for any more?' said Kingdon as they returned to the house.

'Have you backed him?' said Marston.

'Yes, heavily, and got all back I laid you.'

'I am glad of that. We must lay Ike a thousand or so,' said Marston.

'With pleasure,' said Kingdon; 'it will all be due to him if we win.'

'Kingdon, Ike Thurton is part and parcel of the mystery of my life of which you know nothing. How can you trust me with your daughter when you know so little about me?' said Marston.

'I know you're a gentleman and a man of your word,' said Kingdon; 'and that's quite enough for me. Besides, Edith would never have loved you as she does if you had not been different from most men.'

Marston grasped the bookmaker's hand and said:

'I will tell you who and what I am as soon as I am able to be assured of that,' he said; 'I don't think Edith will

regret the step she has taken, and I am glad you trust me, Kingdon.'

'That I'm sure she never will,' he said heartily. 'Don't talk about things that pain you. I'm sure it will all come right some day. If there is any wrong doing I know it's not on your side.'

'No, by Heaven, it's not,' said Marston. 'My whole life has been embittered by the man who ought to have been my best friend.'

'D—— him!' thundered Kingdon.

'I believe he is that already,' gloomily answered Marston. 'But we'll change the subject. Get what you can when you go to the club, Kingdon, and I'll go halves. We may as well have the long odds whilst they can be got.'

The news of a good trial, however, spreads like wildfire, and when Kingdon reached Tattersall's Club he soon saw how the land lay. The trial taking place in August, many backers naturally jumped to the conclusion it was the Sydney Derby Caloola was going to start for first, and they had backed him accordingly. Backers will do these rash acts, and in nine cases out of ten they burn their fingers. Kingdon did not know whether the horse would start for the A.J.C. Derby or not, but he had a good idea that he would not. The bookmaker's instinct was strong within him, and he could no more help laying against the horse for that race than he could have given up his vocation. He peppered away at Caloola to such an extent for the A.J.C. Derby that backers began to fight shy, and it was whispered there must have been some mistake about the trial. The consequence was that Caloola's price for the Melbourne Derby did not shorten much, and Kingdon booked several more wagers over the double.

It must be distinctly understood that Jack Marston knew nothing about the wagers Kingdon had laid against Caloola for the Sydney Derby, and at the time he had not made up his mind whether to start him for that event. He had casually mentioned to Kingdon that he did not think it likely he should do so, and the bookmaker had taken the hint.

Fletcher had heard about the trial. Such men generally do get at the bottom of these things, and, knowing the

horses in it, he thought Caloola had a big show for the Sydney Derby. He made sure that was the race the trial was run for, or else it would not have taken place so soon.

Accordingly, he invested a modest amount upon the horse before Kingdon reached the rooms. When he saw Kingdon laying Caloola he felt uncomfortable, and it did not at all improve his temper. He went home in a very unenviable state of mind, and ready for a quarrel with anyone, which will account for what happened when he reached home rather earlier than usual.

CHAPTER XI.

LORD MAYFIELD'S WOOING.

TRUE to his promise, Lord Mayfield called at Fletcher's house the day after the card-party. He inquired if Mr. Fletcher was at home, and received a negative answer.

'Is Mrs. Fletcher at home?' he asked.

'Yes, sir,' said the smart servant-girl.

'Give her this card, please,' and Lord Mayfield walked into the drawing-room.

Daisy Fletcher had expected this visit, and had arrayed herself for conquest. She was exquisitely dressed, and her voluptuous figure appeared to the best advantage. She looked what she was—a lovely woman. Her eyes sparkled with excitement, and her heart beat faster than usual, for she felt she was treading on dangerous ground. This gave a heightened colour to her cheeks, which made her even more fascinating. She knew what Fletcher was, and she feared him because she knew he loved her in his peculiar way.

It was, however, worth the risk in order to catch Lord Mayfield.

She advanced towards him where he stood upon the hearthrug, and held out her small, delicately-shaped hand, giving him a cordial welcome.

'I am so glad to see you, Lord Mayfield,' she said. 'It was good of you to come. I am sorry Mr. Fletcher is out, but he will be home shortly, I think.'

'Hope to goodness he won't,' thought Lord Mayfield, but he said aloud: 'My dear Mrs. Fletcher, I can assure you it is a pleasure for me to call and see you again. 'Pon my word, I have never had a moment's peace since I left you. I've been thinking about you all the time. How charming you look, and how well that costume fits you!'

'Oh, you flatterer; but I know what men are, and they never mean half they say.'

Lord Mayfield protested, but she stopped him, saying:

'Now, don't deny it, because you know it is true. When Harry stays out all night he always says he missed his train coming from the races, or went to supper with Mr. So-and-So. I know it is not true, but then of what use is it disputing it?'

'You don't mean to say, Mrs. Fletcher, that your husband deserts you like that? He must have very bad taste. I am sure I should be unhappy if I were away from you an hour if you were my wife,' said Lord Mayfield.

'But I'm not your wife, Lord Mayfield; nor ever likely to be. Circumstances alter cases. The grapes are sweet now; if you plucked them you would find they would lose all their sweetness.'

'Never; I swear it.'

'Don't be tragical; it doesn't suit you,' she said, with a laugh.

'Mrs. Fletcher, are you ever in earnest about anything or anybody?' he said.

'Oh yes. I'm very much in earnest when I go to the races and back a horse to win me a few pounds. I'm very much in earnest when I want a new dress and Harry won't give me the money for it; and I'm very much in earnest when cook spoils the dinner, or the cat upsets my best china tea set.'

'Do you know what I have been thinking?' said Lord Mayfield.

Daisy smiled. She thought Lord Mayfield's thinking could not be very deep, but she said:

'No. Do tell me, please. Gratify the natural curiosity of my sex, and confess.'

'I've been thinking whether you were ever in love, Mrs. Fletcher, or were ever likely to be,' he said.

This was a hard hit for Daisy Fletcher; but she bore it without any outward sign of the inward tumult it caused. She had loved once and deeply. That passion was buried, but it still rankled in her heart when stirred into life again.

'How can you ask such a question?' she said. 'I love my husband, of course, or else I could not live with him. I should die if I did not love someone.'

'Do you love Mr. Fletcher very much?' he said, looking at her earnestly.

She blushed, but said:

'You should not ask such questions, my lord; you have no right to do so. Of course I love my husband; and my husband's friend, as I presume you are, should not dare to question it.'

She spoke haughtily. Daisy was a good actress, and she knew the harder she made it for Lord Mayfield to approach her the more he would strive to accomplish his object.

'I hope I have not offended you,' he said. 'If I have, please forgive me.'

'On one condition, that you do not offend again,' she said.

'I am a model of virtue and belief in you from this hour, Mrs. Fletcher,' he replied.

'There is nothing to joke about, Lord Mayfield, and if you persist in this levity I shall leave the room.'

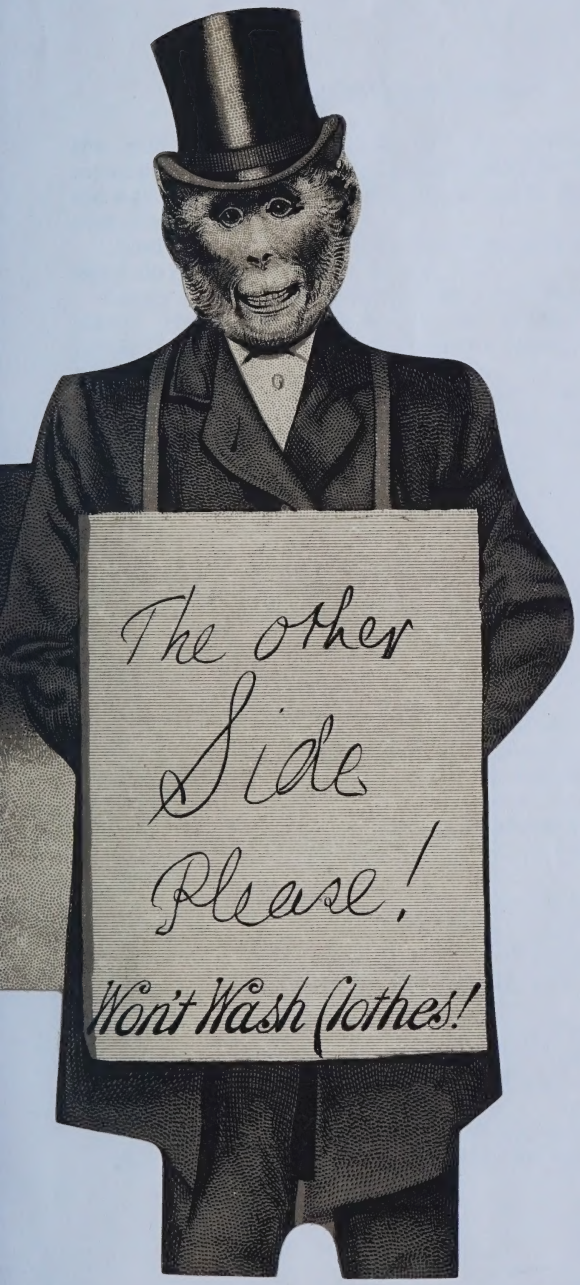
She went towards the door, when he stepped hurriedly in front of her.

'Don't go, Mrs. Fletcher. Daisy, don't leave me like this.'

'Lord Mayfield! you forget yourself. Let me pass!' she said with well assumed anger.

'Hear me,' he cried. 'I cannot help it. I love you, Daisy. I loved you the first time I saw you last night. I would do anything for you—be your humble slave. Oh, Daisy, don't turn away from me like that! I know I ought not to have said it, but I could not help it.'

He went forward and she stepped back and leaned her head upon her arm against the mantelpiece. Her bosom heaved as though she was struggling to force back her tears. Her heart was beating high with hope. He loved her, and


The other
Side
Please!
Won't Wash Clothes!

BROOKE'S SOAP.
MONKEY BRAND.
For Scrubbing Floors
and Kitchen Tables.
For Metals, Marble, Paint & Glass.
For Steel, Iron, Copper, Bronze.
For Stair-Rods and Mantels.
For a Thousand Household Uses.

she, well she loved his title and his wealth. At that moment she positively hated Fletcher because he stood in the way of her ambition. She turned round suddenly, her face pale and agitated.

'Lord Mayfield, you should not have said this. What can I do? Oh! it is cruel of you.'

Beauty in distress was more than Lord Mayfield could stand. He put his arm around her slender waist, and gently led her to the sofa. She did not resist, and he grew bolder.

'Daisy, may I call you Daisy?' he said. She made no reply as he went on: 'Daisy, come away from this life. Leave this house, which is no fit place for a lady such as you to live in. I feel you do not love your husband. You cannot do so. Such a nature as yours would never love a man like that. Trust me, Daisy. I will shield you with my life. I have great wealth, and can give you every luxury, and I solemnly promise if you will trust me I will make you my wife when I can do so legally. This is sudden, I know, but I made the resolve last night. I felt you were not happy in your present life, and I longed to free you from it. Daisy, say you will trust me. Say you can love me.'

He drew her towards him, and she did not resist. He raised her head and kissed her passionately on the lips. She buried her face on his shoulder, and sobbed bitterly.

Her thoughts at the moment were most peculiar. She knew she was acting a part, and she dreaded an exposure. If Lord Mayfield knew she was free, and not Fletcher's wife, she felt sure he would cast her off.

'Lord Mayfield, you have a generous heart,' she said. 'Leave me; it is more than I can bear. It is true I am not happy in my present position, but I must endure it. I would not wrong you by giving you a wrecked life. You little know what I am.'

'Daisy, I do not care what you are. All I know is I love you,' he said passionately; and at that moment, addle-pated as he was, Lord Mayfield meant what he said.

'I dare not love you,' she murmured.

'My darling, you do love me,' he said rapturously.

She looked at him with her lovely eyes, and he was in-

toxicated with her beauty. He took her in his arms and kissed her again and again.

'Daisy, promise to leave this place and go with me,' he said. 'I will take you to England, and once out of Fletcher's reach you will be happy. No one will know what has passed, and as my wife you will be welcomed in all ranks of society. Your beauty will make you a queen amongst the women. They will hate you because they will envy you,' he said.

'Do not tempt me, Lord Mayfield,' she said. 'It is not your wealth or rank that lures me. I would willingly dispense with all that. Much rather would I you were in a more humble position in life.'

'You love me for myself alone, Daisy?' he said exultantly. 'Love at first sight is the best.'

'I cannot deny it; I do love you, Lord Mayfield,' she whispered.

'Then the time will soon come when you shall be my wife, Daisy,' he said.

'Will it, indeed?' said Fletcher, as he came into the room.

Daisy sprang to her feet, with a passionate gesture, and looked at Fletcher as though her glance would kill him. She saw she was trapped and she meant to have it out. This was her last chance. She must not act the coward before Lord Mayfield.

There is an old saying that 'blood will tell,' and although Lord Mayfield was by no means a hero, he had sufficient blood in his veins to make him accept his present uncomfortable position firmly.

'My fault, I assure you, Fletcher,' he said. 'But where the devil did you come from?' he exclaimed in astonishment.

'You were so very much engaged, my lord, that you didn't hear me come into the house,' said Fletcher. 'I have a latch-key, and I let myself in. I saw a pretty little picture through the window, and I fancied it would be interesting to hear a little of the conversation. I did hear quite enough, and now I want an explanation.'

It was evident the man was in a towering rage, but he kept it down wonderfully.

'I have no explanation to offer,' said Lord Mayfield, 'at least, in the presence of a lady,' and he bowed to Daisy.

'A lady!' sneered Fletcher, and the tone was so insulting that Lord Mayfield made a step forward, as though he would have struck him.

He was no match for Fletcher, and he knew it, but Daisy was by, and he must act the man if he did not exactly feel it.

'Don't strike me,' said Fletcher, with a smothered oath, 'or I'll brain you.'

'I will leave the room,' said Daisy.

'No, you don't,' said Fletcher, and he stood with his back against the door; 'I've something to tell his lordship before you go.'

She knew what he meant. The time had come that she dreaded. Well, perhaps better now than at any other time. Lord Mayfield was desperately in love with her, and he might accept the facts in a way that would astonish Fletcher.

'Let your wife pass,' said Lord Mayfield.

'My wife! I like that,' sneered Fletcher. 'Who's my wife, I'd like to know? Not that woman,' he said, pointing to Daisy.

She never flinched, but looked him boldly in the face.

'You scoundrel,' said Lord Mayfield. 'It's a deliberate lie. She is your wife, and worse luck for her.'

'Don't call me names. Two can play at that game,' said Fletcher. 'She's not my wife. Ask her yourself. She's my ——'

Before he could get the foul word out of his mouth, Lord Mayfield had got him by the throat. Had any of his friends seen him then they would have said 'they did not think Mayfield had it in him.' He shook Fletcher with all his might, and the man, an arrant coward at heart, was so taken by surprise that he made very little resistance.

'Say that word and I'll strangle you,' shouted his lordship, as he gripped Fletcher's throat tightly.

'Let me go,' hoarsely said Fletcher.

'Promise not to slander your wife.'

'I'll promise,' he said, and Mayfield let him go.

Fletcher lifted the lid of a small writing-desk against which he had been pushed, and took out a neat revolver.

'Now listen to me,' he said, as he produced the weapon. 'That woman is not my wife. She has been my mistress for three years. Ask her if she can deny it.'

'It is true, Lord Mayfield, that I am not his wife,' said Daisy slowly; 'but it is a foul lie when he says I have been his mistress.'

Strange as this may appear, it was nevertheless true. It had been a peculiar compact between them, and although Fletcher loved Daisy she had sternly made him fulfil his part of the bargain.

Lord Mayfield hesitated for one moment, but a look from Daisy's eyes banished all his doubts.

'I believe what you say,' he said, as he took her hand. 'It is that man's fault. I know it is. He must have trapped you, and you could not escape.'

'He deceived me basely,' she said, taking the cue Lord Mayfield had unwittingly given her. 'He enticed me away, and then I found he could not marry me because——' and she covered her face with her hands, as though overwhelmed with shame, 'because he had a wife already.'

'You villain!' said Lord Mayfield.

'It's a d—— lie,' roared Fletcher. It was, but Lord Mayfield did not believe him.

Daisy saw the advantage she had gained, and endeavoured to increase it.

'Lord Mayfield, you had better go,' she said. 'However miserable I may be with this man, I must bear my fate. I shall always think of your kindness, and now good-bye.'

'Never, Daisy. You are not this man's wife, and therefore he has no claim upon you. Leave this house with me now, and I swear you shall be my wife.'

Daisy gave a cry of delight. She had not quite expected this.

'How generous, how noble you are,' she said. 'But I could not ask you to make such a sacrifice for me.'

'I would do anything for you, Daisy. Come, let us go. You can leave the house at once.'

'By God! she doesn't go a step out of this house with you, or I'll shoot her dead,' said Fletcher.

'No, you won't do anything of the kind,' said Lord Mayfield. He thought, however, as he looked at Fletcher's

infuriated face that the man was quite capable of it, and he wondered what was the best to be done.

Daisy's woman's wit came to her aid.

'Go, Lord Mayfield,' she said, and gave him a meaning glance. 'I will stay with this man. He dare not harm me. I am not afraid of him,' she said, with the utmost contempt.

Lord Mayfield hesitated, but he saw she was determined.

'If I go it will be to return shortly,' he said. 'If you harm her, Fletcher, I'll make you swing for it.'

'Good-bye, Lord Mayfield,' said Daisy.

'I cannot leave you in this unprotected state,' he said.

'I can manage him,' she whispered hurriedly, as Fletcher examined the revolver. 'You don't know the power I have over him.'

Lord Mayfield gave her an admiring glance, and left the room.

'Now, my lady, what have you got to say for yourself?' said Fletcher.

Daisy sat down on the sofa and became convulsed with laughter. She looked at Fletcher with her eyes sparkling with merriment.

'D—— you! don't laugh like that, or it'll be the worse for you,' he said.

'You did it splendidly, Harry. I could hardly keep from laughing in his face.'

'What the devil do you mean?' said Fletcher in a bewildered sort of way.

'Mean? Why, I was only fooling him. You are a consummate ass, Harry. When a young lord comes to the Spider's Web, what am I supposed to do? He made love to me, and I pretended to return it. He'll stick to me like death now, and a pretty penny I can fleece him out of.'

'That won't do for me,' said Fletcher; 'I saw him kiss you, and heard you say you loved him.'

'What if I did? I knew I could not fasten him down any other way. You're a fool for your pains; you've nearly spoilt the game by telling him we are not married.'

'I believe you were in earnest,' said Fletcher hesitatingly. 'If you play me false I'll kill you.'

'No, you won't; I'm too useful to you,' she said.

'He's heaps of money,' said Fletcher.

Daisy saw he was falling into the trap, and she humoured him.

'Money! He rolls in it. He asked me if I wanted a thousand pounds. Said he would give me that to prepare to go away with him. I'll get it next time he comes. You will have to apologize for the scene of this morning, and tell him to call again; you can explain that as I am not your wife you feel you had no cause to behave so badly.'

'I believe you're a devil, Daisy,' he said. 'You can lure men to destruction, and I believe you like it. You get round me easily enough, but if you play me false with this man I'll have my revenge.'

She felt with a shudder that he meant what he said.

'Why did you say I enticed you from home, and then could not marry you because I had a wife?' he asked.

'That was part of the scheme I had formed. I saw you look in at the window, and knew from your face you were in a rage. I formed my plan accordingly, and you see how well it has succeeded. Lord Mayfield has fallen into the net, and he hates you and loves me. I'll turn him to good account for our mutual benefit.'

'You're a clever woman, Daisy,' he said, with undisguised admiration. 'I'll believe you this time; but don't make love to that fool too much; it makes my blood boil,' and he left the room, banging the door after him.

'Cleverer than you think, you brute,' she murmured. 'That was a narrow escape. I feel quite faint. He'll write that note to Mayfield. The money will tempt him. I must be careful, or he will suspect me. I believe he does that already. If I leave this house with Lord Mayfield it must be to get married immediately. When once I am Lady Mayfield I can buy Fletcher off.'

CHAPTER XII.

DETECTIVE SMIRK.

CHRISTOPHER TALBOT SMIRK, the best, or one of the best, officers in the Scotland Yard Detective Force, London. This was the universal opinion of those in the profession,

and they ought to have known. Smirk was remarkably proud of his Christian names. To address him as Christopher Talbot Smirk was to get the right side of him in no time; but his comrades, unfortunately for Smirk, found this title too much for them, and it seldom got beyond Chris Smirk. Smirk had been engaged in many famous cases. He had tracked the perpetrator of a great diamond robbery from Lady ——, when every member of the 'Yard' had given it up as a bad job. He was instrumental in effecting the capture of Charles Peace, the notorious murderer, and Lefroy, the desperate criminal. The case Smirk could not master was considered hopeless. He was a quiet, insignificant, inoffensive man, and might have been taken for a local preacher, or a member of the Salvation Army. Before he joined the force, as an ordinary policeman, Smirk had tried several occupations, but always failed. He had a bad habit of poking his nose into other people's business, which was at times highly objectionable. He had not been long in the force before his superiors saw they had no ordinary man to deal with, and in a short time he was sent to Scotland Yard. Here his rise was rapid, and he soon stood at the head of his profession. He was a fairly well educated man, and could pass muster in good society. His time was fully occupied, and it was seldom he was out of active work.

Squire Drayton, after Ike Thurton's departure, became restless and uneasy. He could not get the idea out of his head that Ike had gone to join his lost son, and he thought if Ike's whereabouts could be discovered Jack would not be far away. He had talked the matter over with his wife and daughter, and they had cordially agreed with him.

Not only did the Squire want his son back, but he missed Ike Thurton terribly, and Roberts was not half the man the old stud groom was.

Roberts had become somewhat 'too big for his boots,' as the saying goes, and as stud-groom at Drayton he domineered over everyone, and was consequently as much disliked as Ike had been respected.

Weston, the trainer, had threatened to give up his work if Roberts was allowed to interfere with him.

For some reason or other Roberts was desirous that

Mohican should run in the Dewhurst Plate, and not be kept back until the Derby.

The Squire, however, was determined to stick to Ike Thurton's suggestion not to start the horse as a two-year-old. Although he had disliked Roberts ever since he took Ike's place, the Squire was loath to part with him because the man knew the horses so well.

Between the stud-groom and the trainer he was nearly badgered to death, and he at last determined to employ a skilful detective to try and discover the whereabouts of Ike and his son John.

He did not communicate his intention to Captain Drayton, and it was probably as well he remained reticent in the matter.

Mrs. Drayton, however, was eager for the Squire to at once procure a reliable man to search for the missing pair.

Accordingly the Squire communicated with the head of the department at Scotland Yard, and the next morning a card was handed him as he sat in his private room—Christopher Talbot Smirk.

'Wonder who this can be? Send him in,' he said to Pete, who had brought in the card.

Smirk was ushered into the room, and he gave a quick glance round as he bowed to the Squire.

He was dressed in a dark tweed suit, and looked anything but the smart man he really was.

The Squire glanced at him as he fingered the card, and thought he must be come about a situation of some description.

'Well, my man, what's your business?' said the Squire.

'I hardly know yet, Mr. Drayton. I'm here for you to explain it to me,' he said.

'Oh, indeed. But who are you?'

'Christopher Talbot Smirk, detective, Scotland Yard, at your service, sir.'

The Squire looked surprised and somewhat disappointed. He had expected to see a very different man from Smirk.

'So you got my letter, eh?' said the Squire.

'Never set eyes on it. Chief told me I was wanted at Squire Drayton's, Drayton Hall, Derbyshire, so I came down by the Midland this morning to see what was up. Is

it theft amongst the servants, or murder, or horse-stealing, or what is it?' said Smirk, quite unconcernedly.

'It's not theft, murder, or horse-stealing,' said the Squire, rather testily. 'I have lost my son, and now my stud-groom has gone, as I believe, after him, and I want you to find them both.'

'Son gone about five years,' said Smirk, as he pulled a small note-book out of his pocket and examined its contents. 'Here we are, "Mysterious Disappearance,"' and he handed the Squire an old cutting from the *Advertiser*.

'Bless me, man! where did you get that?' said the Squire in astonishment. 'I haven't a copy of it myself, and it surely concerns me more than you.'

'Not a bit of it, Squire. I've as neat a little collection of "Mysterious Disappearances," "Undiscovered Murderers," and elegant robberies as ever you'd wish to see. Quite romantic some of them. When I heard the name Drayton from the chief, I turned to the D's in my book and found this. So you want me to find your son after five years' absence. Well, it's a tough job, but it's not an unpleasant one. I'm so used to tracking young men for the purpose of taking them away from their parents for considerable periods that I shall be delighted to try and restore a long-lost son to his ancestral roof.'

The Squire commenced to think there was more in Smirk than he at first thought. When you got Smirk to talk it did not take a man of average sense long to discover he was an amusing and intelligent man.

In a few words the Squire detailed the account of John Drayton's disappearance, and then Ike Thurton's vanishing and leaving no trace behind him. He gave Smirk the torn letter found at Ike's house, and the detective read it carefully.

'Can't tell where it came from, I suppose?' he said.

'Not exactly,' said the Squire; 'but some time ago a New South Wales stamp was found in Ike's house, so the letter may have come from there.'

'Whew!' whistled Smirk. 'It's a deuce of a way to Australia, and on the off chance, too. No end of expense, and perhaps a wild goose chase after all.'

'Never mind the expense,' said the Squire. 'If you find

them, Smirk, I'll give you a thousand pounds, and pay all your expenses into the bargain.'

Smirk opened his eyes. He felt a thousand pounds bonus was not to be sneezed at.

'Thank you, Squire,' he said. 'Depend upon it I will do my best. I will sail for Sydney next week, and if your son and Ike Thurton are there C. T. Smirk's the man to find 'em.'

The Squire then gave the detective a photograph of John Drayton, taken shortly before he disappeared, and he gave him a minute description of Ike.

'No mistaking that man,' said Smirk, as he scrutinized John Drayton's photograph. 'He's a noble-looking fellow. He never did much harm, he didn't, that I'll swear. Why, a man like that couldn't tell a lie.'

'Smirk, you're a brick,' was the Squire's somewhat undignified but hearty rejoinder. That eulogy of his favourite son had won the old man's heart, and he believed in Smirk from that hour.

'Papa, may I come in?' said a sweet voice at the door.

'Certainly, my love. My daughter, Mr. Smirk,' he said, as Rose Drayton entered the room.

Smirk bowed, and bestowed a look of admiration on the fair girl before him. She nodded smilingly at him, and placed some roses on her father's desk.

'Your morning bouquet, papa. Roses as usual. They will remind you of me.'

'No fear of me forgetting you, Rosie,' he said fondly.

'I should think not,' murmured Smirk. 'By Jove! she's a "stunner,"' he thought.

'Rose, this is the gentleman who is going to find your brother if he is above ground,' said the Squire.

'Oh, Mr. Smirk, I do hope you will succeed. I do so long to see dear old Jack again,' she said.

'Well, Miss Drayton, I will do my best to bring him back safe and sound,' said Smirk. 'I'll find him, never fear, and when I do find him I'll give him a piece of my mind.'

'What for, Mr. Smirk?'

'For leaving such a loving sister and good father in distress,' said Smirk.

'But I'm sure it is not his fault,' she said.

'It must have been something desperate made him leave a home like this,' said Smirk.

After half an hour's chat with the Squire the detective was rising to take his leave. He had a good stiff cheque in his pocket, and he rather liked the idea of a voyage to Australia.

'By-the-bye, Squire Drayton, I hope you'll excuse me, but I hear you've got a real good two-year-old that can win the Derby next year. I'm awfully fond of horses; would you permit me to see the animal?'

'Certainly,' said the Squire. 'I'll go with you myself.' He liked a man who was fond of horses, and he began to think Smirk was a real wonder.

'How did you know I had got a good two-year-old?' said the Squire.

'We know everything at the "Yard," and we know the Drayton Stud is famous in the racing world. I heard it at Tattersall's that you had a real clinker by Hermit—Fairy Queen, and I know she's the best mare in your stud.'

'Fred must have been saying something about Mohican,' said the Squire; 'I wish he'd keep his tongue still.'

'That's more than most young men can do. Some of them beat the ladies,' said Smirk. 'Is Captain Fred Drayton your son, may I ask, Squire?'

'Yes, he is,' was the reply.

'He's a gay young man, he is. Handsome too. Makes a mess with the ladies' hearts,' said Smirk.

'Do you know him?' said the Squire, in surprise.

'Know him? rather. I know all the young swells in London worth knowing,' said Smirk. 'I meet him at the Pelican sometimes.'

'The what?' said the Squire.

'The Pelican. Most respectable sporting rendezvous, I assure you.'

'Oh!' said the Squire doubtfully. 'I never heard of it before.'

By this time they had reached the stables and met Roberts, who conducted them to Mohican's box.

The vivacious Smirk was fully alive to the great beauty of this splendid son of Hermit, and he gave expression to his admiration in no measured terms.

'He's a grand un, Squire Drayton. If looks go for anything, he ought to be a real good one.'

'Yes, he's a good horse,' said the Squire; 'and he looks very well now. I hope you'll be back to see him run, Smirk.'

Now, if the Squire had never heard of Detective Smirk, Roberts had, and he glanced curiously at the man he had read so much about.

Smirk had eyed Roberts over, and the inspection did not favourably impress him. He fancied he had seen his face before. Yes, no doubt about it, he had seen the man at the Pelican with Captain Drayton. 'And a pretty pair of beauties they are,' he thought.

'I wish Jack was here to see the horse,' said the Squire; 'he did love a good racer, and, by Jove, Mohican is one.'

'I hope he'll be back to see the Derby,' said Smirk, loud enough for Roberts to hear.

The stud-groom looked startled. If 'Master Jack' was found, and came home, it would upset all his plans. He must send word to Captain Drayton at once. He knew what Smirk was by reputation, and he had a firm belief he could find Master Jack, or any other man.

'I don't much like the look of your stud-groom,' said Smirk to the Squire, as they walked back to the house.

'He is not a favourite of mine,' he replied, 'but I don't think there is much harm in him. Thurton said he was a good man with the horses, and so he is, but not half so good as Ike.'

'Glad to hear it,' said Smirk. 'But I wouldn't trust him too much.'

Smirk left Drayton Hall after promising to write regularly to the Squire to report progress, and said he would at once cable when he found the runaways, as he had no doubt he should do. His confident tone gave the Squire hope, and he shook hands with Smirk, as he got into the trap to be driven to the station, with much heartiness. Smirk, as he leaned back in the corner of the railway carriage, smoking one of the Squire's best Havannahs, thought deeply. He had an arduous and difficult task before him. He had no doubt that John Drayton had gone to Australia, and he was also confident that Ike had followed him, as the Squire had

fully explained the love the stud-groom bore to his young master. He also thought he should be able to find them, because a young man of racing proclivities, and a stud-groom, were sure to frequent racecourses and sporting haunts. The great difficulty he foresaw would be the getting them back to Drayton Hall. If he knew why John Drayton had disappeared he felt his task would have been much easier; but a man who could voluntarily exile himself for five years he knew would not return to England without a considerable amount of persuasion. However, he did not let this trouble him much. His first duty was to 'catch his hare,' then 'cook it.' He also wondered what Roberts had been doing at the Pelican with Captain Drayton. He knew enough of the Captain's character to put him down as a bad lot. 'Some trickery about that horse, I'll bet. How the deuce could a noble old fellow like Squire Drayton have a son like that? The man's a sharper, and yet he can have no need to be. I'll get at the bottom of all this business somehow. Wonder if Captain Drayton had anything to do with his brother's disappearance. It's more than likely. Let me look at that mystery again,' and he took the paper from his pocket-book. '"Bride disappears on her marriage eve and so does the bridegroom." Curious; Captain Drayton couldn't have had a hand in that. Let me see, I recollect something about the girl returning home and dying of a broken heart. In that case she could not have married John Drayton. He don't look a man of that sort from his photo. If it had been the Captain, now, I could easily have believed him capable of any cruelty. Gad, it would be funny if he was the man who had run off with that girl. It's possible. He'd do it to spite his brother. He's just the man for a dirty job of that kind, and women are most unaccountable creatures. Well, that's no business of mine. And yet it might afford a strong argument to induce John Drayton to return home. I won't let the Captain know I'm going, and the sooner I'm off the better.'

The train reached St. Pancras Station. Detective Smirk reported matters to his chief and received his orders.

Next week he sailed for Sydney in the R.M.S. *Victoria*, and when Captain Drayton heard of it, as he did from

Roberts, he ground his teeth and swore terribly. Why he should have let such a trivial incident as Detective Smirk's departure for Australia affect him was best known to himself.

CHAPTER XIII.

SMIRK MAKES A DISCOVERY.

When Christopher Talbot Smirk arrived in Sydney, after a pleasant voyage in that floating palace, the *Victoria*, he was considerably surprised, almost as much so as Ike Thurton had been when he landed. Smirk had an idea that Australia was a most undesirable country to live in, and that as for the detective and justice forces, they must be composed of very inferior men.

He had brought a letter of introduction from the chief in Scotland Yard to the head of the Sydney detective force, and naturally this was the individual he first became acquainted with. Smirk's fame had preceded him, and he was naturally made much of. A little flattery went a long way with Smirk, and he got plenty of it from the Sydney men engaged in a similar occupation to himself.

Naturally one would have thought Detective Smirk would have made known the object of his mission, and courted assistance in his endeavours to find John Drayton and Ike Thurton.

Smirk was, however, a peculiar man, and he had his own way of doing business. He always worked single-handed until he found it was impossible for him to succeed without assistance. He had made up his mind to find the men he was in search of without the help of any of his Sydney *confrères*.

'Time enough to fall back on them when all else fails,' he thought; 'but I'll just try my hand at this little game myself first.' And he did. Pump him as they would, not a word could the local detectives extract from Smirk as to his mission. They respected him all the more for his reticence, and in a few days looked upon him with a certain amount of awe and respect.

The photograph of John Drayton he had studied until he knew every feature of the man, and if he met him in the street he felt sure he should be able to recognise him.

Smirk had been in Sydney a week when one morning he found himself strolling along the Randwick Road and admiring the scene, and inhaling the fresh air with a considerable amount of pleasure. The detective had an eye for the picturesque, and when a tram came rushing along he stood and stared at it, and eventually came to the conclusion it did not add to the beauty of the locality.

He arrived at 'Hawk's Nest,' and admired the well laid-out ground as he stood at the gate.

'Nice place this,' he mused; 'suppose some swell lives here. Never thought they could come this style. Bless me, it's a perfect paradise.'

'Hi! lad, whose is this place?' he said to Willie, the jockey, who happened to come in sight.

'Mr. Kingdon's,' said Willie, and was passing on when Smirk, who, for a wonder, appeared to be in a very loquacious humour, stopped him.

'What Mr. Kingdon, eh?'

'Don't you know him? Must be a new chum, then,' said Willie, with a look of compassion. The lad lived in the racing world, and the man who didn't know the leviathan in his set must have been born very young.

Smirk felt disgusted. The idea of any lad taking him for a new chum!

'Been in the colonies years,' said Smirk. 'Know more about Melbourne than Sydney though.'

'It must have been a rum place in Melbourne where you lived, if you didn't know Mr. Kingdon,' said Willie. 'Perhaps you're not in the line.'

'What line?' said Smirk.

'Racing. What other line is there worth being in?' said Willie.

'Oh, Mr. Kingdon's a racing man, is he?' said Smirk.

'Rather. He's the biggest bookmaker in Australia,' said Willie, with pride.

'No wonder he's a fine place,' said Smirk.

'What's your game?' said Willie.

Smirk was startled. Here was this youngster, probably a

stable-lad, cross-questioning the great detective from Scotland Yard. Such impudence could not be tolerated.

'Don't be impertinent. You'll come to a bad end, you will, you rascal,' he said.

'There's been a lot of suspicious customers about here lately,' said Willie, 'and I don't much like the look of you.'

'Confound you,' said the enraged Smirk, as he caught Willie by the collar, 'what the devil do you mean?'

The lad shouted out, and struggled to get free from Smirk's iron grasp.

'Here, what's all this about?' said a strong, hearty man's voice, as its owner caught hold of Smirk's arm.

The detective, still holding Willie by the collar, looked round.

'Great Scott! it's himself!' exclaimed Smirk, as he let go of the lad in his excitement, and stared hard at John Marston.

'Yes, it's myself, there's no doubt about that,' said Jack Marston, who had come up at the time. 'You look as if you knew me. I must say I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance. But why did you catch hold of the lad?'

'I told him we didn't want any loafers hanging around here,' said Willie, as he skipped off out of Smirk's way.

Marston laughed heartily, and said:

'Willie's an idea that every stranger seen within a hundred yards of the gate has evil designs upon the horses. You must not take any notice of him; he's a good lad.'

'Wouldn't look at the little beggar again,' said Smirk. 'My card, sir.'

'Christopher Talbot Smirk,' said Marston. 'Haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance.'

'Probably not. I only arrived from England a week ago,' said Smirk.

'But you appeared to know me,' said Marston, with some show of surprise.

'I think I know you, Mr. Drayton!' said Smirk slowly, to see what effect the announcement would have, for he felt sure the man before him was the old Squire's son.

Jack Marston turned pale as death, and staggered back as though he had been hit.

'You are mistaken, Mr. Smirk,' he stammered. 'My name is John Marston.'

'Excuse me,' said Smirk, as he drew John Drayton's photograph from his pocket; 'do you know that?'

Marston saw he was discovered, and he wondered now who the curious man before him could be.

'Let me explain,' said Smirk. 'At the request of Squire Drayton, of Drayton Hall, Derbyshire, England, I have come out to this infernal country to find two men. One his son, John Drayton, the other his stud-groom, Ike Thurton. The Squire gave me instructions to bring these two men back to England with me, and also to deliver this letter to John Drayton when I found him. Here is the letter, and if you are the Squire's son, as I believe you to be, take it and read it. If not, return it to me unopened.'

He handed Jack Marston the letter. The sight of his dear old father's handwriting unnerved him, and the tears started to his eyes.

The detective understood his man well. He knew that the test would be too much for him if he were John Drayton.

Marston put the letter in his pocket after kissing it fondly. Yes, he kissed that bit of paper, and I honour him for so doing. It showed the man's heart was in the right place. A man who can forget his father or mother is not to be trusted. A strong man overcome with emotion is under certain circumstances a pleasant yet touching sight. Marston held out his hand to Smirk, and the detective gave it a hearty shake. He liked the man before him, and he was pleased he had so speedily accomplished his mission.

'I will read this letter when I am alone,' said Marston.

'Quite right, Mr. Drayton,' said Smirk.

'Hush, for Heaven's sake! My name is Marston—John Marston.'

'All right, one's as good as another to me,' said Smirk. 'I must cable to the Squire to say I've found you.'

'You must do no such thing,' said Marston hurriedly. 'I forbid you to send any message or to say you have found me.'

'But my instructions were definite,' said Smirk, 'and moreover, I'm to get a thousand pounds for finding you and taking you safely home.'

'I'll double it if you'll say nothing about it,' said Marston.

Smirk looked grieved.

'I never accept bribes,' he said.

'It's not a bribe. I have urgent reasons why I should remain hidden in obscurity. Perhaps I may never return home,' he said sadly.

'Don't say that, sir,' said Smirk. 'If you knew how the old Squire longs for you you'd pack up and be off next week.'

'He does miss me, then?' said Marston.

'Should think he did, and Thurton too. Hasn't a man about the place understands what he wants.'

'Captain Drayton. Is not he there occasionally?' asked Marston.

'Oh, no. The Captain, from what I know of him, prefers his club or his little villa in St. John's Wood to Drayton Hall. Bad taste I consider it.'

'D—— him!' said Marston.

'That's where the shoe pinches, is it?' thought Smirk. 'I knew that blessed officer was at the bottom of the trouble. My game is now to find out what it's all about. He's screening that gambling beggar, I'll bet a dollar.'

'We cannot talk here, Smirk,' said Jack. 'Come to town with me and have lunch.'

'Right,' said Smirk.

'Wait here for me a minute,' said Marston, as he went towards the house.

'Fine fellow that,' mused Smirk. 'I wonder what the deuce possesses him to stop out here; he's evidently in with this bookmaker, Kingdon. I don't like that. Gambling and racing plays the deuce with these swells. He's a real swell, too. Regular chip of the old block.'

Marston hastily explained to Edith that he could not stay for luncheon as promised, as he had a most important engagement. Although disappointed, she excused him, for she had implicit faith in her lover, and knew he would not leave her unless it was absolutely necessary.

Marston rejoined Smirk and they proceeded back to Sydney together.

Over a bottle of wine during the afternoon, Smirk explained how it was the Squire had sent him out to Australia,

and Marston was astonished to hear he was a detective, and at first was rather indignant at his father for setting an officer of the law on his track. However, he soon became reconciled to the inevitable, and considered, after an hour's conversation with Smirk, that a detective was not such a bad sort of fellow after all.

'And you say my father looked well? You see I acknowledge whose son I am,' said Marston with a smile.

'Looks good for another twenty years,' said Smirk 'He's a fine old English gentleman. You're very like him, Mr. Marston.'

'Do you think so? It was generally considered the Captain, my brother, was more like my father.'

'Not a bit of it,' said Smirk. 'Captain Drayton's a bad lot—that's my opinion. I could tell a few tales about him.'

'I don't want to hear them, Smirk. He is my brother, although he has behaved like a scoundrel,' said Marston. 'Mohican, you said, looked well. Ike told me about him. He said he was the best two-year-old he ever saw at Drayton, and that is saying a good deal. How I should like to see him run in the Derby and win it!'

'So you can,' said Smirk. 'We shall be back in old England long before that, I hope. I must cable to the Squire to-night.'

'I have told you not to do anything of the kind,' said Marston. 'Listen to me, Smirk. I don't want you to send word to my father that you have found us until after the Melbourne Cup is run, and I am married. You can write and say you are on the right track; or, better still, cable at once and say so, for it will ease the old dad's mind. God knows, I am anxious to get back home again, but I tell you it is impossible at present. You need not mind the expense of staying out here, for I will see you are no loser by it, and I think you will find we are not such a bad lot in the colonies after all. You can put up here with me, and I'll go bail you enjoy yourself thoroughly during the next two or three months.'

This proposition rather pleased Smirk, but he did not care to give in all at once. He fancied it would not look professional.

'It's more than my reputation is worth,' he said. 'If I make this discovery right away I shall be put down as the cutest man in the "Yard." Squire Drayton would consider me a perfect marvel, and it's too good to let a chance like this slip.'

'You can't force us to go,' said Marston, laughing; 'and as I have made up my mind not to go until I am ready you had better accept the inevitable.'

'It's deuced hard lines, Mr. Marston, just when I had made such a splendid job of it, to be slipped up like this.'

'Perhaps you may get an opportunity of distinguishing yourself here,' said Marston. 'Come, consider my proposal over, and we will shake hands and say "done."'

Smirk at last, with some show of reluctance, consented, and satisfied his conscience by cabling to Squire Drayton that he was on the right track, and might come across the parties any moment.

'Why are you so anxious to stay until the Melbourne Cup is over?' he said to Marston, when they returned from the telegraph-office.

'That's my secret, Smirk. I think, however, I see a chance of making you a rich man before you return home.'

'No horse-racing for me,' said Smirk; 'you don't catch me fooling any hard-earned fivers on horse-flesh. Women and horses I can't stand at any price.'

'Bad taste, Smirk, very,' said Marston. 'I'm fond of both. At least, very fond of one woman, and one particular horse.'

'Going to get married, are you?' said Smirk. 'What will the Squire say, eh?'

'He will heartily approve of my choice,' said Marston. 'She's the best, sweetest——'

'Here, hold on, Mr. Marston. I've heard all that before. They're all sugar till you find 'em out.'

'Well, I won't tell you,' he laughed. 'But the lady is the daughter of Mr. Kingdon, the gentleman who owns that house you were so much admiring when I made your acquaintance to-day.'

'Ah,' said Smirk.

'Well,' said Marston.

The pair looked at each other, and Smirk had such a

woeful expression of countenance that Jack could not forbear bursting out into a hearty laugh.

'What's the matter with you, Smirk? I declare you look as if you'd just been to a funeral.'

'Mr. Kingdon is a bookmaker, isn't he?' said Smirk.

'Yes. What of that?'

'You ought to look higher than a bookmaker's daughter, Mr. Marston,' said Smirk.

'Oh, hang it all! don't preach, my dear fellow. Miss Kingdon is not tainted with racecourse scandal. You'll say so when you know her.'

'Am I to go to Mr. Kingdon's with you?' said Smirk.

'Of course you are. You are one of us now,' said Marston. 'You must link your fortunes with ours for a time.'

'I'm to be one of the family circle?' said Smirk.

'Certainly. You are my very good friend,' said Jack, with a profound bow, his eyes sparkling with fun.

'Hang it all, you are a brick, sir! Don't tell me you're not your father's son after this. I'm with you, Mr. Marston. If I can assist in any legal measure I will do so.'

'Perhaps we will require your services in an official capacity. Who knows?' said Marston. 'It may come in handy to have Mr. Christopher Talbot Smirk, the smartest man in Scotland Yard, on our side.'

Smirk felt flattered.

'C. T. S. is at your service,' he said. 'I hope, however, you will have no need of me in that light.'

'I hope not,' said Marston. 'Where shall we go to-night? Let me see. Yes, that will do. We'll go to the opera, and have a nice little supper afterwards; eh, Smirk?'

'Suits me exactly,' said Smirk. 'But I say, Mr. Marston, no ladies. Can't stand 'em. Always means mischief when there are ladies about.'

'Very well, Smirk; we'll have a bachelors' supper,' laughed Marston.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ELOPEMENT.

ALTHOUGH 'Spider' Fletcher only half believed what Daisy had told him with regard to the scene he had witnessed between herself and Lord Mayfield, still the young nobleman was too rich for Fletcher to let him slip through his fingers. He hated him cordially, and therefore he was all the more desirous of being revenged upon him. Even if Daisy was merely playing upon Lord Mayfield's feelings, he felt quite sure, as far as his lordship was concerned, he was generally in earnest. His indignation at Fletcher's brutal conduct was too natural to have been feigned, and the 'Spider' had not forgotten the grip Lord Mayfield had on his throat. If Daisy was acting, his lordship certainly was not.

Accordingly Fletcher took the first opportunity of apologizing to Lord Mayfield for his conduct, and for reasons of his own the latter accepted Fletcher's protestation that he meant no offence.

If Fletcher hated Mayfield, the young lord returned it with fourfold bitterness. He was madly in love—infatuated would be the better term—with Daisy, and Fletcher's possession of her nearly made him frantic. He felt it was quite true that this ill-assorted pair were not married, and he wondered what could possibly bind them together. How Daisy had contrived to propitiate Fletcher he could not surmise. She must have had extraordinary control over the man to have reduced him to such a state of submission that he actually apologized to the man who had tried to wrong him so bitterly.

Lord Mayfield was in no proper frame of mind to consider the consequences of the step he was taking. His sole desire was to obtain possession of Daisy. He had at last commenced to admire the firmness and decision of John Marston's character, and Jack, ever ready to see all that was good in the man, had come to regard Mayfield as a harmless and not half a bad-hearted fellow. Lord Mayfield had told Marston of the *contretemps* at Fletcher's, and also taken him into his confidence as to his intentions in regard to Daisy.

Marston had done all in his power to persuade the infatuated young man to leave the lady alone and not meddle in the domestic affairs of such a dangerous man as the 'Spider.' He pointed out to him the folly of the step he was about to take, and what an invidious position it would place him in when he returned home and assumed the position in society to which his rank entitled him. He reasoned with him that women of Daisy Fletcher's disposition were not desirable companions, and pointed out that their loves were unstable and inconstant.

Although Lord Mayfield heard this good advice patiently he did not profit by it. He resumed his visits at Fletcher's house, and generally managed to be there when Daisy was alone. He became more and more intoxicated with her beauty. With all a woman's art and wiles she lured him into the meshes of her net. She could do anything with him, and he knew it.

Time after time he implored her to elope with him, and leave all her troubles and trials behind. Daisy would have liked nothing better, but she had a dread of Fletcher's vengeance. She knew the man better than anyone, and was certain he would stick at nothing. Murder was not too terrible for Fletcher to commit if he could do it without much fear of being discovered. Her great hope lay in Fletcher's inordinate love of money. She felt that once she was safe with Lord Mayfield she could buy the man off. It would probably take thousands, but then Lord Mayfield was willing to sacrifice any amount in order to obtain the woman he had set his heart upon. When once the thing was done, Fletcher would have to accept the inevitable, and that in the shape of a stiff sum of money would probably not be unacceptable to him.

Daisy, however, overlooked an important matter. She forgot that Fletcher could never be bought off, but could constantly harass and annoy her by demands for money, which for her own peace she would have to supply him with.

'Constant dripping will wear away a stone,' and at last Lord Mayfield, by his continued protestations, had persuaded Daisy to leave Fletcher and live with him. He promised to marry her as soon as they were out of the 'Spider's' reach.

All was arranged, and one afternoon Lord Mayfield called as usual, and Daisy Fletcher left her home with him.

There was nothing unusual in this, because they frequently went out together, and the servants took no notice of the occurrence.

Fletcher came home, and when he found Daisy was out with Lord Mayfield he grumbled but said very little, expecting they would return later in the evening.

He went into the card-room and there he saw a note on the table. He picked it up and recognised the handwriting as that of Lord Mayfield.

What could this mean? He began to have misgivings, and was reluctant to open the envelope. He felt it between his fingers and turned it over nervously several times. At last he opened it and read as follows:

'Daisy has gone away with me. She prefers the society of a gentleman to the brutal insults of a man like yourself. You must not blame her, as I have done all in my power to persuade her to leave you. If you require an explanation I shall be willing to afford it you. I enclose a cheque for £500, which I feel sure you will accept. I will settle the amount on you annually, granting you do not try to see Daisy and annoy myself. Should you do either the annuity will at once cease. I trust this will be considered a sufficient recompense for any wrong I have done you. For my own part, I feel I have done a good action for once in my life in relieving Daisy of your presence. There is no need for me to sign my name. You will know from whom this letter comes by the cheque.'

Fletcher turned pale as he read, and it was evident he was in a terrible rage. He hated to be talked about, and he knew he would be unmercifully chaffed over this affair. The cheque for £500 somewhat soothed his feelings, and he thought perhaps after all he was well rid of a woman who had ceased to have any respect or regard for him. He sat down in an easy chair and thought the matter over as calmly as he was able. He was furious at being tricked; he saw that, after all, the scene he had witnessed was real, and that Daisy had deceived him. He felt he had been duped,

fooled, and made ridiculous by a man he thoroughly despised and a woman he loved in his own brutal fashion. Daisy had been very useful to him, and he did not know how to replace her. He would have his revenge. What was £500 a year to a man like Lord Mayfield? He would bleed him and bleed her too, he vowed. Lord Mayfield should rue the day he had persuaded Daisy to leave his home. Suddenly the thought that Wells, the jockey, was desperately in love with Daisy occurred to him, and he smiled sardonically as he thought he saw a way of making the man a tool in his hands to work out his plans.

He sat for more than an hour planning and plotting, and at last he appeared to have made up his mind. It was evident he had no intention of tracking the runaways and endeavouring to get Daisy back. He felt it would be almost useless. He must make the best of it, and 'have it out' in some other way.

He rang the bell and explained as well as he could do that Mrs. Fletcher would not in future reside there—that arrangements had been made for her elsewhere, as they had had a misunderstanding and agreed to separate. He said they could all stay on at the house as usual, and he gave them to understand that he should only be home at night-time, when visitors would call.

Servants are not slow at jumping at conclusions, and they saw at once that Mrs. Fletcher had gone out with Lord Mayfield never to return.

The general opinion was that she had acted wisely, but for all that there was a unanimous chorus of disapproval at such flagrant conduct.

That night it was known at most of the sporting and fast haunts in town that Daisy Fletcher had eloped with Lord Mayfield.

Wells heard it at Tattersall's Club, and ground his teeth with rage.

Marston heard it and said, 'Poor devil!'

'Yes, I'm afraid Lord Mayfield will soon tire of her,' said his informant.

'I'm afraid she'll soon tire of him,' was the rejoinder.

Kingdon heard it, and said it was just what he expected, and he always thought her a bad lot.

And the gossip went round, and after being a nine days' wonder it ceased to attract much attention.

Lord Mayfield and Daisy went direct to Brisbane; and, being a truthful recorder of facts, I may as well state here, in order that my readers may not think too hardly of the pair, that they were married there. There could be no doubt about it. Lord Mayfield kept his word, and Daisy Fletcher was transformed into Lady Mayfield, and united to a wealthy nobleman of ancient lineage.

They remained in Brisbane a month, and then returned to Sydney. The announcement of the marriage had been published in all the papers. This proved conclusively that Daisy Fletcher had never been Mrs. Fletcher at all, and again there was a chorus of 'I thought so!' 'Knew it all along!' 'Sly dog, that Fletcher!' 'Suppose Mayfield must have come down handsomely and bought the "Spider" off!'

Fletcher appeared to have got over his trouble quickly, and he carried on his home in much the same style as he did before Daisy left it.

Lord Mayfield had taken a large house in Macquarie Street, and furnished it superbly. He kept his carriages and numerous horses, and Lady Mayfield was soon considered the best dressed woman in the city. He lavished his great wealth upon her, and it was easy to see the man was completely under her control. A title covers a multitude of sins, and so Lady Mayfield found out. Wealth will accomplish almost anything, and Lord Mayfield meant to buy his wife the position he felt she ought to occupy. His house became a fashionable rendezvous, and I am afraid curiosity to see Lady Mayfield had a good deal to do with attracting the visitors.

Daisy bore her new honours with ease. She was a magnificent woman. No one to look at her would ever read her history. She was a woman born to be admired, and she demanded homage from the men and dared the women to attempt to dethrone her. Lord Mayfield was proud of the sensation his wife caused. Wherever they went they were the cynosure of all eyes. At the theatre Lady Mayfield, resplendent with priceless diamonds and dressed in the height of fashion, caused more sensation than the greatest star on the boards.

Smirk saw her for the first time at the Theatre Royal, and he was quite overcome.

'Why, Smirk, I don't believe you've seen half the play,' said Jack Marston. 'I declare Lady Mayfield has made a hole in your woman-despising heart.'

'She is a remarkable woman,' said Smirk. 'I'd like to know her. She'd be a desperate customer to tackle.'

'I'll take you to Mayfield's and introduce you,' said Marston.

They went to Mayfield House the next day, and Smirk was charmed with all he saw. Lord Mayfield could not quite make Smirk out, but as he was a friend of Marston's he presumed it was all right. Lady Mayfield did not feel quite at her ease with Detective Smirk. He looked at her with his keen eyes as though he would pierce her through. She was an interesting study for Smirk, and he liked a woman with a history, as he believed Lady Mayfield had. Marston had told Smirk all he knew about Daisy, and the detective had come to the conclusion that Fletcher would be a remarkably difficult inconvenience for her ladyship to get rid of.

'I don't much like her looks,' he said to Jack Marston, as they sat talking over their visit that night. 'She's flighty and dangerous. I could tell she didn't like me. That fellow Fletcher will have a bad half-hour of it if he gives her much trouble.'

Smirk pulled out a neat note-book and made an entry.

'What are you doing, Smirk? I never saw such a fellow for making notes,' said Marston.

Smirk handed over the book, and Marston read, 'Lady M. dangerous.'

Marston laughed as he said:

'Your diary will afford some interesting reading when you have departed for a better land, Smirk. Why did you make that note?'

'Because I have formed an opinion of her ladyship, and I want to see if it turns out correct. If it does it will prove once more I am a good judge of character.'

'I suppose you have got me down there?' said Marston.

'Yes; look, there is your character in a nutshell.'

Marston took the book and read, 'J. M., the only man who eevr got the better of C. T. S.'

Marston laughed heartily as he said:

'Why, anyone would think I was a desperate criminal if they read that.'

'It's true,' said Smirk. 'You turned me from the path of duty, and here I am actually on terms of friendship with a man I was paid to track down and convey safely home to England.'

'I wonder what Fletcher will do,' said Jack, after a brief spell in the conversation.

'Make it remarkably hot for the pair of 'em, I should say,' responded Smirk.

'Yes, but how? Lord Mayfield will, no doubt, make a handsome allowance, and Fletcher will do anything for money.'

'Except forfeit revenge,' said Smirk. 'There'll be mischief in this affair yet.'

The detective chuckled as though he had scented a neat little affair, which would cause him additional fame.

'I hope Fletcher will do nothing rash,' said Marston. 'I don't like his keeping so quiet; it's dangerous. He never mentions the affair; and when he is spoken to about it laughs and says he is well out of a bad bargain. Wells, too, has become quite changed since the marriage took place. I half believe the poor devil was in love with her himself. He looks as pale and miserable as a ghost.'

It was true what Marston said. Fletcher had made no sign as yet, and Daisy commenced to think he would leave her in peace. She had seen him once or twice in the street, but he had avoided her glance. Now that she was Lady Mayfield Daisy felt she was beyond his reach almost. Lord Mayfield was so affectionate, and gratified her smallest wish, that she began to love him. She had never met with such kindness before, and she knew that he had made a considerable sacrifice in marrying her. Daisy was not altogether a bad woman at heart, and, although she married Lord Mayfield purely from mercenary motives, she gradually began to like him for himself. The 'world' said they were miserable, 'and serve them right.'

But the 'world' was wrong, as it generally is, and Lord and Lady Mayfield were a passably happy pair.

All was sunshine with them at present, and no dark shadows had fallen across their path. Daisy sometimes thought this peacefulness could not last, and she dreaded the day when Fletcher would make a move, as she felt almost certain he would.

Fletcher's name was never mentioned between Lord Mayfield and his wife, and he had not told her of the £500 annuity he had agreed to give the man.

Mayfield House became one of the most popular places of entertainment in Sydney. Certain people declined to visit there, but the majority went 'with the tide.'

Mayfield gave the best dinners, and had the best wines of any man in the city, and he spared no expense to make his house an attractive meeting-place.

Lady Mayfield's name figured as patroness at church and hospital bazaars, and if a subscription was wanted for a charitable object Lady Mayfield generally topped the list. Fletcher smiled at all this display; he meant to bide his time. When he did make a move he was determined it should be effectual.

CHAPTER XV.

KINGDON HAS HIS DOUBTS.

CALOOLA'S preparation was proceeding as satisfactorily as his best supporters could have wished. Under Ike's careful tuition and Willie's excellent exercise-riding the horse had become quite tractable, and lost a good deal of his bad temper. At times it would occasionally break out, but the exhibitions were becoming less frequent. The horse was regularly worked, and he looked in splendid health and condition, 'fit to jump out of his skin,' to use a racing term.

Peculiar interest appeared to attach to Caloola's doings on the track at Randwick, for, no matter at what hour he appeared, some 'tout' was sure to be there watching him have his 'pipe-opener.' Fletcher was a constant attendant on the course in the early morning, and he had bought a couple of horses with Lord Mayfield's 'monkey,' and was preparing

them for a selling race or two, at which game he was particularly lucky. He noticed the improvement Caloola had made, and he was judge enough to know that by the first week in November the horse, if he kept well, would be fit to run for a 'Queen's ransom.' He hated to think such was the case, but he could not get over the existing state of affairs. He had all at once become remarkably civil to Ike, and the old stud-groom fancied he meant mischief, he was so amiable and good-tempered. Ike would far rather the man had been openly hostile, for instinct told him Fletcher's manner was forced and unnatural. The man was constantly hanging about the lads connected with Kingdon's stable, and was evidently on good terms with some of them. Then it was known that Wells, the jockey, was a great friend of Fletcher's, and this was another matter that troubled Ike considerably.

Kingdon, too, had his doubts also, for he had seen a certain class of bookmakers always ready to lay the horse at a fair price either for the double or the Derby or Cup singly. The men who were laying Caloola heavily were substantial members of the ring, and Kingdon knew, from his own experience, they would never take liberties with the horse without they had good reason for it. It took Kingdon all his time to maintain the horse's position in the market, and do as he would, Caloola was anything but firm in the betting. He had backed the horse to win him an enormous stake, and Marston's money was constantly coming to the rescue. Heavy gambler that he was, Kingdon began to feel doubtful whether he had been wise in risking so much. He would have trusted Ike Thurton with anything, and also the lads in his stable were reliable. But when he came to think of Wells riding he did not half like it. That jockey's reputation was none of the best, although a better man never got into the saddle so far as riding was concerned. Kingdon was a keen observer of races, which some of his calling are not, and he knew that Wells had 'pulled' horses when no one but a thorough judge could have seen the game. Wells had never been 'carpeted' for suspicious riding. He was far too clever for that. He could lose by a neck when he could have won by a length, and this was what made him so dangerous. Wells was a miser, and he

loved money more than anything in the world. A safe thousand was more to him than a prospective ten thousand. His motto was 'a pound in my pocket is worth ten in another man's.'

Kingdon was aware of all this. He had been deceived himself once by Wells.

This talented jockey had ridden a horse for him and lost by a head, and Kingdon felt certain the fellow had done his best to win.

Some weeks afterwards, however, he discovered by a mere accident that Wells had sold the race. If the proof had not been indisputable, Kingdon would have never believed it, for Wells rode such a desperate finish on the horse, that it seemed impossible more could be got out of him. Subsequent running, however, proved the form as all wrong, because when ridden by 'Willie,' the same horse had literally made a hack of the winner on the previous occasion. And so 'taking one consideration with another,' Kingdon had arrived at the conclusion that Wells was to be 'got at.'

There must, however, he felt, be something more than the mere 'squaring' of Wells, because another man might be put up at the last moment.

Fletcher, Kingdon was aware, would not stick at a trifle, and if it came to a pinch he believed the man would endeavour to 'nobble' the horse.

The situation became more serious every day, and at last Kingdon came to the conclusion that, if Caloola was to hold his place in the betting, he must start at the A.J.C. Meeting, and win if possible.

It was the week before the Spring Meeting at Randwick, and Kingdon had as usual gone to Tattersall's Club.

Marston joined him during the night, and about ten o'clock the betting on the A.J.C. Derby and Metropolitan became somewhat brisk.

Vestal, the winner of the Hawkesbury Handicap, was favourite for the long-distance race, and five or six others were well backed, including Kingdon's Firefly.

Only a few wagers had been booked on the Derby, the favourites being the Hon. James White's Perfection, Mr. Long's Rob Roy, Mr. Wallace's Shot Gun, Mr. A. Town's

Hobart, Mr. Stead's Maori, and Mr. T. Lamond's Captain Cook.

Perfection was backed down to as little as 6 to 4.

'Won't you take a shot about Caloola, Mr. Marston?' said a well-known bookmaker.

'No, thanks. I haven't made up my mind whether I shall run him or not yet,' said Jack.

'Keeping him for the double, eh, sir? Take my advice: give him a run at Randwick,' said the bookmaker.

Kingdon called Marston on one side, and they had an earnest conversation.

The bookmaker strongly advised him to start Caloola for the Derby, and gave his reasons for so doing.

'If he runs well it will keep him up in the market,' he said. 'You see, he's not quite wound up yet, and although he may not win, still he should run well enough to give the public an idea of what he can do in the Melbourne Derby. All our money is on for that double, and so we must keep him up in the market if we can. I don't like this constant laying against him; it looks ominous.'

'Can't make it out myself,' said Jack. 'The horse is all right, and Ike is sanguine of success. What do you think it is, Kingdon?'

'Wells and Fletcher combined, I fancy,' he replied.

'Nonsense. Wells knows it will pay him better to win than lose. Mind you, I don't like the fellow; but he's a real good jockey. If we make it worth his while to win he'll do his best,' said Jack.

'That may be so, and it may not. I should have a good talk with Wells up at my place, and just see how the land lies.'

'Not a bad idea; I will. He's never been "carpeted" by the stewards yet. We'll "carpet" him in your snuggery, Kingdon,' and Marston seemed tickled at the idea.

'Start Caloola for the Derby next week,' said Kingdon, 'and we'll have a hundred or two on him just to let them see we mean business.'

'Perhaps it would be as well to give him a spin,' said Jack. 'But I don't expect he will win. He's hardly wound up enough for it. Ike's been keeping him steadily going for the Melbourne races, but he would like to see the horse run in public before that day.'

'I'm sure it will be best,' said Kingdon. 'You see we don't know how he'll take on in a crowd, and with the colours up.'

'Very well. I'll agree to it. Suppose we back him to-night.'

'Not for much. Just a trifle to hint he may start,' said Kingdon.

Marston booked 100 to 6 three or four times, and it quickly got about that Caloola would start for the A.J.C. Derby.

Follow the leader was the order of the night, and before eleven o'clock Caloola was well backed at 100 to 10.

Fletcher was in the rooms whilst the business was going on, and he hardly anticipated this move. He didn't think Caloola would win, but he took £50 to £5 on the off chance, 'just to have an interest in the brute,' he said.

Marston went home with Kingdon that night, and Ike joined them, and the trio sat up until well on into the early hours of the morning.

Ike related how civil Fletcher had become all at once, and both Kingdon and Marston agreed with him that this boded no good.

'If he gets at Wells we shall have to find another jockey,' said Kingdon. 'I think it would be as well to engage a second in case we want him.'

'No occasion to do that,' said Ike. 'If you don't put Wells up, let Willie ride him.' Kingdon laughed at this, and said Ike must have a very good opinion of the lad, but for his own part he would not care to have him up on Caloola.

'Willie's a real good lad,' said Jack, 'and I don't know but that Ike is right. He knows the horse thoroughly, and has had one or two severe tussles with him, and he rode him splendidly in the trial.'

'He'd get flurried and lose his head in a big race,' said Kingdon. 'We must have an old hand up. There are some real clinkers in the Derby, and it won't do to lose a chance.'

'That lad's as old-fashioned as the best of 'em,' said Ike. 'I don't know much about your Australian jockeys, that's certain, but Willie would be quite good enough for me with the best of 'em.'

'You haven't seen Hales ride yet,' said Kingdon; 'then there's Power, Fielder, Ellis, O'Brien, and several more good ones. Wells is the only man I know can hold his own with that lot.'

'I've seen every jockey worth calling a jockey ride in England,' said Ike, 'and Willie's got the makings of a real good un in him.'

'There's one thing about him—he's honest,' said Marston.

'"True as steel" as far as that goes,' replied Kingdon. 'Experience we must have, though.'

'If I might advise you,' said Ike, 'I would put Wells up in the Derby next week, and see how he handles the horse. I don't think he can win. Can't beat Perfection in his present condition, and I'm rather glad of it.'

'Why?' asked Marston.

'Because Perfection is thoroughly wound up for the race,' said Ike; 'and it's my opinion he'll go off a bit before November, and if he does we shall win. He's the only horse we've got to beat.'

'What about Rob Roy,' said Kingdon. 'He's been well backed during the week.'

'Can't beat ours,' said Ike. 'There's one thing I must speak about. Caloola, although he has lost much of his savage temper, must be very carefully handled, or it shows on him again. The other morning he nearly went mad, but Willie quieted him down. If Wells bustles him he'll turn sulky. Is he a man to ride well to orders?'

'If he thinks it will win him a race he will,' said Kingdon; 'but he has a will of his own, and occasionally rides his own race.'

'He must take his orders from me,' said Marston, 'and if he doesn't carry them out I shall know what to think about it.'

'He's awfully cut up about that runaway match of Mayfield's,' said Kingdon.

'Surely he wasn't smitten there himself?' said Marston.

'Daisy Fletcher could simply twist him round her finger,' said Kingdon. 'It's my belief he's pulled many a horse because she asked him to do it, and that brute Fletcher had put her up to it.'

'Well, Lady Mayfield won't recognise him now, I suppose,' said Jack.

'She will, you bet,' said Kingdon. 'It's born in that woman to do mischief. If she asks him for a tip on the course Wells will go half mad with joy. She'll do it, too, and I don't fancy Lord Mayfield will stop her.'

'We must have her on our side, if that's the case,' said Marston.

'For Heaven's sake don't tell her all about our arrangement,' said Kingdon. 'She's bound to tell it to the first woman she meets, and it'll be all over the place in no time.'

'I must have a chat with her,' said Marston.

'If it came to a pinch she might use her influence with Wells.'

'Don't have any woman in the swim,' said Ike. 'They don't understand the business. If Wells is not safe, put Willie up. Hang it all, I'd rather ride the horse myself than you should consult Lady Mayfield.'

Marston and Kingdon both looked at Ike, and they suddenly noticed he had reduced his weight considerably.

'You've knocked a bit of flesh off since you've been here,' said Kingdon.

'Feel all the better for it,' said Ike. 'I ride in the exercise work most mornings just a couple of rounds.'

'Should think the trainers laugh at you,' said Kingdon.

'Yes, they smile,' said Ike. 'But they're used to me now, and although I got a good deal of chaff at first, that has all passed off.'

'Well, Ike, we'll fall back on you,' said Marston, with a laugh, 'that is, if we can get no one else. 'I'm afraid your riding days are about over, eh, Ike?'

'I've a pretty clear head and a good hand yet, Master Jack,' said Ike, momentarily forgetting that 'Master Jack' was forbidden ground.

'I have no doubt about that, Ike; but still, we'll not trouble you to have a mount. You shall have the pleasure of looking at the race instead,' said Jack.

'I hope so,' he replied, and then he asked:

'What are these big sweeps they get up on the Melbourne Cup? Are they genuine? I saw one of £50,000 the other day advertised in a paper.'

'Genuine enough, I should think,' said Jack. 'Have you speculated, Ike? You must be getting a regular gambler in your old age.'

'I've got a couple of tickets in,' said Ike. 'The stake is a big one, and worth the risk, although the odds are a shade too long for my fancy.'

'Lets hope you'll draw the winner, Ike,' said Kingdon. 'If you do, and Caloola gets licked, you can see us through,' he laughed.

'No such luck,' said Ike. 'I look upon the couple of pounds as clean gone. By the bye, do you know a man called Bates?' he asked.

'Tom Bates, the bookie? Rather,' said Kingdon; 'he's one of the few good sorts, but I'm afraid he's been hit hard lately. I know he laid Vestal heavily at Hawkesbury and stands bad against her for the Metropolitan.'

'I'm sorry to hear that,' said Ike.

'Do you know him?' asked Jack, somewhat astonished.

'Oh, yes, I know him,' said Ike. 'You see this sov. on the end of my chain? Well, he gave me that.'

'Gave it you. Why?' asked Jack.

Then Ike related the story of how Tom Bates, thinking he was hard up, gave him the coin, and how he vowed he would never part with it, and do Bates a good turn if he could.

'By Jove, he's a good fellow,' said Marston, when he heard the incident narrated. 'We must give him a lift if Caloola wins.'

'He's laid heavy against him, I fear,' said Kingdon.

'For the double?' said Jack.

'Yes; and for the Derby too,' said Kingdon.

'He'll have to hedge if the horse goes on all right,' but we can't tell him anything at present,' said Jack.

'I'm going to put him a trifle on,' said Ike. 'I mean the quid to bear good interest for him.'

It was finally agreed that Wells should be sent for to Hawk's Nest in the morning, and that a thorough understanding should be arrived at with him as to Caloola and the Derby and Cup races. If he was found to waver, Marston was to relieve him of the mount at once.

'I don't like drawing the fellow like this,' said Jack; 'it

looks mean to doubt him. We cannot afford to run any risk though, so the sooner we have it out with him the better. Send him up in the morning, Ike, and we'll get the unpleasant job over as soon as possible. I'm afraid I shall make a mess of it, though. Smirk would be the man to draw him out.'

'Who's Smirk?' said Ike and Kingdon in a breath.

'A detective from Scotland Yard. I must introduce you. He's a real good fellow. I believe he knows you, Ike,' said Jack with a laugh.

'Not him,' said Ike. 'Never had much to do with those gentry.'

'Bring him up some night,' said Kingdon.

'Very well. You'll find him entertaining.' And with a hearty 'Good-night,' they separated.

CHAPTER XVI.

WELLS 'CARPETED.'

IKE saw Wells at Randwick next morning, and mentioned to him casually that Mr. Marston would like to see him at Hawk's Nest at 10 o'clock, and accordingly at that hour the jockey repaired to Kingdon's house. He thought Marston must want to consult him as to the forthcoming Derby and Cup, but he had no idea he was to be sounded and drawn out as to his intentions in regard to that event. Wells had not yet got over Lady Mayfield's marriage, and he considered he was an ill-used man. Although Daisy had encouraged Wells in his attentions to her for special reasons of her own, he had no cause to flatter himself that she was more than ordinarily fond of him. He did her bidding, whatever it was, and he was quite contented to be rewarded with a smile.

It is strange the remarkable power some women wield over men, and Wells' was a case in point. There could be no mistaking his devotion, and at times Daisy had been contented to feel that at all events there was one man she could thoroughly count upon as being faithful and true. She knew the power she held over the jockey, and as yet she had wielded it mildly.

As Wells strolled up the walk he thought of the days gone by, and wished they could return. To look at Wells, he would not have been taken for a jockey at first sight. He was more than ordinarily tall for one of his calling, but lightly, though strongly built. He was 'long in the leg,' sporting men said, and he had a peculiar knack of lifting a horse at the finish with his powerful limbs. He was clean shaved, and had rather an intelligent, although somewhat pinched face. He had by no means a horsy appearance, although the air of a racing man might be visible to a practical eye. Side by side with Ike, Wells would have been taken more for a young sporting swell and Ike for his trainer or jockey. When he reached the house he was ushered into the smoking-room and found Kingdon and Marston there.

'Good-morning, Wells,' said Marston. 'I want to have a little talk with you about certain matters connected with the mount I have engaged you for, and so I told Ike to send you across this morning.'

'I expected that was what you wanted me for,' said Wells. 'Caloola appears to be doing well. Are you going to start him at Randwick?'

'Yes,' said Marston; 'and I want you to ride if you will.'

'I've had an offer to ride Rob Roy,' replied Wells, 'and they tell me he has a very good chance of winning.'

'I cannot say as much for Caloola, as he is hardly fit yet; but I should like you to ride him so that you would have a good idea how he goes, and be better able to judge of his chance at Melbourne,' said Marston.

Wells looked thoughtful, and did not reply for a moment, but at length he said:

'Well, you see, Mr. Marston, I don't like to throw a chance of winning away, and Mr. Long's trainer tells me Rob Roy must go very near it. I'd sooner ride a winner than a loser any day, even if I lost a bit by it.'

'Would you?' said Kingdon, with a curious look.

'Certainly. I like a good mount, and Mr. Marston tells me that Caloola is not fit,' said Wells.

'Why are you so desperately anxious to ride Rob Roy?' said Kingdon.

'Because I think he can win,' said Wells.

'No other reason? If it's money, say so,' said Kingdon.

'It's not money,' said Wells. 'No doubt I shall get a fair stake if I win, because the owner will not be particular to a few pounds over it.'

'And what if it loses?' said Marston.

'I must take the risk of that, of course,' said the jockey.

'I'll make it worth your while to ride Caloola, Wells,' said Marston. 'I'll give you fifty pounds for the mount, and another two hundred if he wins.'

'That's a generous offer,' said Kingdon.

'Yes, it is,' said Wells; 'but I don't think I can accept it.'

'If you don't care to, of course I will not press it,' said Jack; 'but you had better consider at once. I wanted particularly to speak to you about Caloola for the Melbourne races. It's no use beating about the bush, Wells, and you know I am pretty plain spoken; so I hope it won't hurt your feelings if I say I have heard you don't always ride straight.'

Wells changed colour in an instant, and then in an indignant tone said:

'Then I decline to ride for you at all, if you cannot trust me. I'd like to know the man who told you that lie, Mr. Marston.'

'I told him,' said Kingdon deliberately, 'and it's true.'

'It's a d—— lie,' said Wells, now fairly roused. 'I didn't come here to be insulted, and I'm surprised at Mr. Marston standing such a dirty trick.'

'Desperate ills need desperate remedies, Wells; I'm paying you a big retainer for the Melbourne events, and you ought to be satisfied with it. I must, however, be certain that you will not throw me over. I don't like you being so intimate with Fletcher. You know very well that he is no friend of mine, and I hear Lady Mayfield had considerable influence over you at one time.'

This was a sore point with Wells, and he plainly showed it was so. 'It's deuced rough on a fellow to be hauled over the coals like this for nothing. I'd like to know what I've ever done to Mr. Kingdon that he should tell such a lie about me.'

'Pulled Firefly,' said Kingdon quite coolly.

Now this was a staggerer for Wells, because in the particular race in which he had just succeeded in losing on Firefly Kingdon had complimented him afterwards upon his horsemanship. He knew by the way Kingdon said 'Pulled Firefly' that he must have discovered all about that little swindle, and he hastily jumped to the conclusion that Lady Mayfield must have let the cat out of the bag, because the scheme was concocted at Fletcher's house. Without considering what he was saying, he convicted himself, for he exclaimed in a blunt kind of way, 'She told you. I didn't think she would have done it. I'd never have lost that race if it hadn't been for her.'

It was Kingdon's turn to look surprised now, and Marston also was startled, for he felt Wells could have alluded to no one but Lady Mayfield. If she had this great power over the jockey, it was more than ever desirable she must be on their side, and then they had Wells safe as though he was bound in iron bonds.

Kingdon, too, guessed it was Daisy Mayfield, who had, no doubt at Fletcher's instigation, prompted Wells to pull Firefly. He had not heard the news from Lady Mayfield, but he left Wells in doubt about the matter.

'And if she did say so, what then? I'd like to know who *she* is, first?' said Kingdon.

'Oh, you know well enough,' said Wells. 'I'll chuck the whole lot. I've not been a straight goer all my life, Mr. Marston, but I'm no worse than dozens of other fellows.'

'I don't think you are, Wells. If you'd cut adrift from bad companions you'd soon be at the head of your profession. You are now, as far as riding goes, but unpleasant though it may be for you to hear it, I may tell you a good many people say you are not to be trusted,' said Jack.

'A nice little swindle you worked off on me that time, Wells,' said Kingdon. 'I'll forgive you if you promise to ride Caloola in the Derby next week, and go straight when we put you up.'

Wells again hesitated. It was evident he had some good reason for wishing to ride Rob Roy.

'If you don't ride him,' said Kingdon, 'I'll expose you. You did me out of a tidy sum over Firefly, and it is not so

long ago that the club won't hear a complaint about the matter. I've good proof, I can tell you, so you'd better look out.'

'I'd never have done it, Mr. Kingdon, if it hadn't been for her. Don't rake the matter up, it would ruin me. I'll ride Caloola next week, and do my best for Mr. Marston.'

'That's right, Wells. You see, it was quite proper Kingdon should let you know that he was aware you did not try to win on Firefly. It would never do for us to have no faith in you. Can we trust you now, Wells? Be a man and cut off these bad acquaintances. Who's the lady, eh?' said Jack, with a smile.

'You know well enough,' said Wells dejectedly.

'I fancy I do,' said Jack. 'It's a matron of high degree, is it not?'

'Hang chaff,' said Wells angrily.

'It's not chaff. The lady I mean has a very high opinion of you, Wells, and I'll get her to ask you to win on Caloola next week.'

'She'd not speak to me,' said Wells, 'and yet I've done her many a good turn in the old days when she was not so proud as she is now.'

'Poor chap, he's very far gone,' thought Jack. 'He deserves to be pitied. Why, the man's a regular slave, and I don't think the pretty coquette cares a fig for him. There's no telling, though. Ladies have strange fancies.' Aloud he said to Wells :

'We can trust you, then, for the Melbourne races? Don't associate with Fletcher too freely; he's a man I don't like, and he'll do you no good, take my word for it.'

'He'll do me no harm,' said Wells. 'I can't cut him dead. He's done me a good turn or two.'

'If you play us false,' said Kingdon, you're a "broker." I'll split as sure as your name's Wells, and I could get you disqualified for life.'

'I'm sure you'd not do it, Mr. Kingdon.'

'I'm sure I would if you worked off any little game this time.'

'He'll ride for us and win if he can, won't you, Wells? That's all settled,' said Jack.

'Mr. Marston, I'd sooner win for you than any man. It's

rough on me being drawn out like this, but I'm not so bad as they try to make out, I assure you. Why don't you get another jockey if you can't trust me?'

'Because I think you can beat the lot of them,' said Jack.

Wells looked pleased. Marston had hit him in the right place.

'I think I know as much as most of them,' he replied. 'I'll take my oath I'll ride my best for you, Mr. Marston.'

'I believe you, Wells, and, what's more, I'll trust you. It is better we should have had this matter cleared up. A fault confessed is half atoned for, and if you do your best this time I'm sure Mr. Kingdon will take no notice of that Firefly escapade.'

'That Firefly escapade, as you call it, Mr. Marston, cost me just a cool five hundred pounds. I'll let bygones be bygones, provided he goes straight in the future,' said Kingdon.

'Thank you, Mr. Kingdon. You shan't have cause to regret your decision,' said Wells.

'Mr. Smirk wishes to see Mr. Marston,' said the servant, opening the door.

'Send him in,' said Jack. 'This is the gentleman I told you about,' he said to Kingdon with a smile.

Smirk came in, looking neat and prim as ever. Wells eyed him over, and came to the conclusion that he was a 'very young man' at the game.

'Permit me to introduce you, Smirk, to my friend, Mr. Kingdon,' said Jack.

'Delighted, I'm sure,' said Smirk.

'This is Wells, the celebrated jockey,' said Marston.

'Ah! Heard of you before,' said Smirk.

'Any news in the city, Smirk?' said Marston.

'Never is any news in this infernal hole,' growled Smirk. 'I shall be glad when I'm out of it. By Jove, I was at the opera last night, and Lady Mayfield was pointed out to me. She's a real crusher. Whew!' whistled Smirk, in ecstasies.

Wells looked at him as though he could strike him, and Smirk saw it out of the corner of his eye. It was a current belief of Scotland Yard that Smirk had eyes all over his head, and that it was no uncommon thing for him to see in

the dark. He took a decided antipathy to Wells on the spot. He had an idea that all jockeys must be incarnations of wickedness.

A knock at the door, and Kingdon said:

'Come in.'

Ike Thurton entered to the response, and Smirk gave a gasp, as he exclaimed:

'Why, that's the other one!'

'I told you Mr. Smirk knew you, Ike,' said Marston, with a hearty laugh.

'Glad to meet you, Mr. Thurton. 'Pon my word, it's a pleasure. I got quite an accurate description of you. Gad, you must have had the same togs on when you left home,' said Smirk.

Ike looked hard at Smirk, and then said in his dry way:

'You're the cove from Scotland Yard, are you?'

This was too much for Smirk. To be called 'cove' by Squire Drayton's ex-stud-groom and Marston's trainer was a great shock. Smirk put on an injured air, at which Marston and Kingdon could not help laughing.

'"Cove," I believe you said, Mr. Thurton. My name is Christopher Talbot Smirk, and I'm not in the habit of being called a cove.'

'All right, Mr. C. T. Smirk,' said Ike. 'I won't offend again. So you've come to look me up, have you? Well, I'm going to stop here with Mr. Marston. I've done nothing wrong, so you needn't look me through with those eye-openers of yours.'

'I'll explain all about Smirk's visit to Sydney some day, soon,' said Jack in a whisper to Kingdon.

'Part of the mystery of your life, eh?' said Kingdon, with a smile.

'Yes. Can you trust me with a detective on my track?'

'Yes, my boy; I'm giving you Edith,' said Kingdon in a tremulous whisper.

Marston gave him a grateful look. Wells could not make Smirk out; he wondered what on earth a Scotland Yard detective could want at Kingdon's with Ike Thurton.

'Good-morning, gentlemen,' said a cheery voice at the open window, and Edith Kingdon looked in.

A charming picture she was. Dressed in a white dress,

with a large straw hat covering her fair head and half hiding her pretty face, her dainty hands encased in garden gloves, and a bunch of beautiful flowers, which she dangled in front of them, she looked a perfect model of dainty womanhood. Marston thought what a lovely bride she would make, and said merrily:

'Good-morning, Miss Kingdon. I must beg a button-hole. Stay, I'll come outside,' and he stepped lightly through the window. Edith fixed the button-hole in his coat, and then they started away together.

'That's polite, I must say,' muttered Smirk.

'A handsome pair. Don't you think so?' said Kingdon, with an admiring glance at Jack's manly form and Edith's graceful figure as they went down the walk lovingly together.

Jack turned round and shouted:

'Excuse me, Smirk, I'm engaged for the morning. Mr. Kingdon will take care of you!'

'Cool, very,' said Smirk. 'Who's the lady?'

'That's my daughter,' said Kingdon, with pardonable pride.

'Whew!' whistled Smirk. 'I admire Mr. Marston's taste. Your hand, Mr. Kingdon. You've found the best man I've ever met in a pretty lengthy experience for a son-in-law. Mr. Marston's one in a thousand, sir.'

'I believe he is, Mr. Smirk.'

The good opinion Smirk had of 'Master Jack' won Ike's heart at once, and from that moment he thought 'the cove' one of the best of men.

Ike and Wells left the room together, and Kingdon and Smirk sat down to a cigar and the detective's favourite beverage, 'Scotch.' Smirk could be entertaining when he liked, and the whisky being good and the cigars undeniable, he amused Kingdon with rendering racy anecdotes. Jack Marston and Edith Kingdon we can safely leave together. It was a real case of 'love amongst the roses' that morning.

Wells told Ike he was to ride Caloola next week, and they went to have a look at that worthy, and the old trainer gave the jockey sundry hints as to the horse's temper. As Wells scanned the noble animal over he thought: 'You look good enough. I'll ride you to win, at any rate, and Fletcher can get somebody else to do his dirty work. If it

wasn't for that money I owed him, I'd have cut him long ago. I must hold on to him a bit longer. It'll do no harm to let him think I'm all right, and that I'll "stiffen you," my beauty. I owe him one or two, though, and if you can win the double, my noble, I fancy it will about bowl him out.'

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SPRING MEETING.

THE first day of the Randwick Spring Meeting is always enjoyable. There is a mild excitement about it that lends a certain charm, and yet there is an absence of feverish intensity, or mad speculation, such as one sees at Flemington on Cup Day. After all, Randwick is not such a bad place, and so thought the thousands of people who wended their way thither to see the Derby, and get if possible a line for future events. The road to the course was, as usual, crowded with a mass of vehicles of all shapes and sizes. The carriage and pair was side by side with the hansom and light spring-cart. The four-in-hand drag competed with the four-in-hand 'bus, the former splendidly horsed, the latter drawn by four picked screws brought out for the occasion. There was a trotting sulky, with a dashing mare in, good for her mile in three minutes anywhere. A furniture cart, with improvised seats, filled with a mass of humanity from Woolloomooloo, came along at a rapid pace. A high-seated dog-cart, whose owner and driver looked down with a supercilious leer at the vulgar crowd beneath. Along by the tram-line tramped hundreds of people through the dust, chattering, laughing, giving tips, and prognosticating the success of their particular fancies. The tram dashed past with a shriek and a whirl, sending up a cloud of dirty, grimy dust and smoke. People jammed inside like herrings in a barrel, the conductor still arguing at one compartment, where he swears solemnly he only received thirteen instead of fourteen shillings.

Over the sandhills at the back of Mount Rennie come the crowd; down through the Centennial Park a mass of people from the higher suburbs wend their way. From all

quarters of the city they come, all eager to back their fancies and go home money in pocket.

Familiar faces are to be met with on all sides. In the paddock there are so many well-known men, it would be superfluous to name them.

It was a large crowd even for Randwick, and judging from the scratching-board there would be good fields.

Ike Thurton had just brought Caloola on to the course before the crowd arrived so that the horse would not be worried, and it was as well he had done so, for the gradually increasing crowd appeared to excite the animal strangely.

Jack Marston, accompanied by Lord Mayfield and his wife, and Edith Kingdon, not to mention Smirk, had also driven up a good hour before the time for the first race. This party attracted a considerable amount of attention. Lady Mayfield's history was pretty well-known, and the 'naughtiness' surrounding her past life added a piquant flavour of excitement to the curiosity manifested on the occasion.

Daisy was, however, quite equal to it. She was not at all abashed by the somewhat bold stare of the men, nor did she notice the extremely stand-off look of some of the ladies. She was Lady Mayfield, and she knew the power of the title and meant to use it. Edith Kingdon had been persuaded by Jack Marston, much against her will, to go with the Mayfield party. Jack had peculiar ideas of his own, and one of them was that he considered Daisy a much-injured woman, and thought she had done perfectly right in making Lord Mayfield and herself happy. Perhaps he is right. And Edith Kingdon found this 'runaway' lady, whose past career was not all that it should have been, very lively, not at all coarse in her manners, and very pretty.

Lady Mayfield was one of the best dressed ladies on the lawn, and Edith Kingdon looked the beauty she was. I cannot pretend to describe their costumes, it is beyond me, so I leave it to the imagination. But when I say the men raved about them, and the women cordially detested them, it may safely be taken for granted they were dressed in the best possible taste.

Smirk had come out of his shell, and was resplendent in a light suit, white top hat, and a gorgeous button-hole. He

could be amusing at times, and he was delighted to find himself in such good company, although he pined for the mild excitement of being on some 'swell's' track.

Smirk was left with the ladies, while Jack Marston and Lord Mayfield strutted down the paddock to have a look at Caloola. Strictly speaking, and I am a veracious chronicler, Smirk was left in charge of the ladies, for they ordered him about, and he obeyed in a placid manner that quite astonished himself. Smirk had, however, visions of a goodly luncheon with champagne *ad lib.*, and the anticipation made him at peace with all mankind for the time being. It was really surprising how Jack Marston had taken to Lord Mayfield after the *contretemps* at Hawk's Nest. He soon found out that beneath his lordship's affected ways there was a genuine warm heart. Lord Mayfield respected Jack's firm, manly character, and was, to tell the truth, a little afraid of him.

As they walked towards Caloola's box Wells joined them, and the trio found Ike and Willie doing all they could to pacify the excited animal.

'He hates the crowd,' said Ike. 'He's quiet enough here, but he knows there are a lot of people about as well as we do. He's nervous, and I don't think he'll run well.'

'Never mind that, Ike. It will try what sort of stuff he's made of, at all events. The field will be small but good, and if he cuts a respectable figure I shall be quite satisfied.'

''Pon my life he's a beauty,' said Mayfield, with his glass at his eye. 'He's rather big, though, is he not?'

'Yes, he's not fit by any means,' said Ike. 'Another month will work wonders with him.'

'I shall have a lively ride, I'm thinking, Mr. Marston,' said Wells. 'I don't much fancy it. Suppose he bolts again?'

'Do as I did,' said Willie; 'stick to him. If he bolts with you he can't help but win.'

Wells looked at the lad to see if he had any hidden meaning in his words, but it was evident from Willie's face he had made no innuendo in his remark.

'He'll not bolt, Wells, with you. Keep a firm grip on him. Let the other beggars make the running, it will take you all your time to hold him back. He's a bit short of condition, so don't bustle him too soon. Keep with 'em

though, and bring him with a run when once you are fairly in the straight. He may not win, but he can get a place, I think,' said Ike.

'Let's go and see how the betting is,' said Lord Mayfield. 'Have you a mount before the Derby, Wells?'

'Yes, the second race, but I can't win,' was the reply.

'He's a cunning fellow, that,' said Mayfield to Marston. 'Is he straight, do you think?'

'Yes, he is now, I'll guarantee him,' laughed Jack. 'Wells has turned over a new leaf.'

'Wells,' he called, and the jockey came back. 'Just take this race-book to Lady Mayfield and tell her I sent you to mark the card for her.'

Wells' eyes glistened with pleasure, and he gave Marston a grateful look. He went off gaily to do his mission. He came up to the ladies, who, accompanied by the faithful Smirk, were examining the horses in the paddock. He raised his hat politely as both Lady Mayfield and Edith recognised him.

'Wells, you must give me all the "good things" to-day,' said Lady Mayfield, with a cunning smile.

'Mr. Marston sent me with the race-book and said I was to mark the card,' was the reply.

'Thoughtful of him, was it not, Edith? Are you quite sure he sent the card to me and not Miss Kingdon?' she said, with a roguish look.

Edith blushed, and Wells said:

'He certainly mentioned your name, Lady Mayfield.'

'Ah, he knows Miss Kingdon never bets. Well, mark the card and let me see what sort of a prophet you are. If you find me three winners you shall have a diamond horse shoe in your tie next week, Wells,' said Lady Mayfield.

'Thanks, your ladyship, you're too good,' said Wells, with a flush of delight, as he proceeded to mark the card, and then handed it to her.

'Why, you haven't ticked Caloola, Wells. Don't you ride him?' she said, surprised.

'Yes, I ride him, but I don't think he can win. Perfection will be the one, I think.'

Lady Mayfield knew something of Wells and his character, and she took him aside a few yards.

'Straight, Wells?' she said, looking him in the face.

'Yes,' he said, with downcast eyes.

'If you ever ride one of Mr. Marston's horses as I know you have ridden other people's, Wells, I'll never forgive you,' she said.

'I'm true as steel now,' he said. 'I wouldn't deceive Mr. Marston for anything.'

She saw he meant what he said, and, holding out a neat little gloved hand to Wells, said:

'I knew you were a good fellow at heart. I'll not forget you, Wells.'

As the jockey touched her dainty hand he trembled all over, and the gentle pressure she gave him made his pulses tingle and his heart beat fast. From that moment Lady Mayfield had bound him doubly fast to her. She was a woman, and, therefore, she knew it.

Wells walked away, and his face expressed the joy he felt. He'd never ride another 'cronk' race, he vowed, so long as he lived.

'Hallo, Wells, where the deuce are you off in such a hurry?' said a hard, rasping voice. It was Fletcher that spoke. The jockey halted, and was then about to pass on.

'Here, what are you up to?' said Fletcher. 'None of your high and mighty games with me. You can't sheer off now, my boy. We're in the swim together, and must go with the tide. I saw you talking to her sublime ladyship. Suppose she's been getting the soft side of you again. D—— her, I'll be even with her, yet,' he growled.

Wells could have felled him where he stood, but he knew he was to a certain extent as yet in the man's power. He meant to get rid of him, but he could hardly do it with safety at present.

'What's up?' said Wells. 'Have you had a fit or been up all night? You look jolly blue.'

'What's up, eh? I want to know whether Caloola's going to win to-day,' he said.

'No, I don't think he is,' said Wells, with a wink.

'Can he?' said Fletcher.

'I believe so,' said Wells.

'You're a better man than I thought you, Wells. Stick to me, and I'll see you through,' said Fletcher. 'I must

lay the brute if I can,' and he went off highly delighted, for he was sure he had got hold of a 'dead 'un.' Wells chuckled as he thought of the trick he had played Fletcher. He meant to win if he could, but he didn't see much chance of it, and so he left Fletcher to imagine he would not try to win, even if he could.

The Hurdle Race and Trial Stakes were over, and luncheon had been discussed. As the time drew near for the great race of the day the betting became brisk, and Kingdon had his work cut out to lay all the wagers asked for. Perfection was a strong favourite at odds of 6 to 4 against, whilst Rob Roy and Shot Gun ran him close. Caloola figured at 6 to 1, taken freely; and Captain Cook was at an outside figure. Hobart was occasionally nibbled at; and these comprised the six starters. Caloola had been brought into the paddock and walked around, and he kept the crowd at a respectful distance by constantly lashing out with his heels. Ike had his work cut out to keep him quiet, but he seemed gradually to get accustomed to the crowd. The jockeys had weighed out, and Wells in the scarlet jacket of Jack Marston came across with his saddle to mount Caloola.

The horse eyed him all over, and when the clothes were stripped off him he looked a perfect specimen of a thoroughbred, although good judges shook their heads and pronounced him slightly on the big side. The horse was a picture of health, his coat bright and clear, but he seemed fretful, and Ike found saddling him no easy matter. Savage snaps with his teeth, pawing the ground, and circusing round at a rapid rate, were a few of the amusements he indulged in. But his trainer had plenty of patience, and took his time about it. At last the saddle was firmly on, and Wells came up to mount him.

Caloola objected, and the bell rang 'Go to the post' before the jockey had succeeded in getting on his back.

Once Wells was firmly seated in the saddle Caloola quieted down, and when Ike let his head go on the course he walked quietly up the straight. Perfection led the way in the preliminary, with Tom Hales sitting like a fixture. A great horse and a good man was the universal opinion.

Marston, Lord Mayfield, and the ladies were occupying a

good position on the stand, and they narrowly watched Caloola as he swept by with a long, low stride that showed he could gallop. Wells sat him like a rock, and the horse pulled hard.

'What's that?'

'Must be something of Marston's. It's his colours. Yes, it's Caloola. That's the horse there's been such a lot of talk about lately. He's been backed for a fortune for the Melbourne Cup. Looks well, don't he? A bit big, I fancy.'

These were the remarks Edith Kingdon heard from a party standing at the back of them. She watched Caloola eagerly and was quite excited, although Jack had told her he did not think the horse could win, and Wells had confirmed that opinion.

'Wells says Perfection will win,' said Lady Mayfield to Jack Marston, 'but I've put a saver on Caloola.'

'Wells is about right, I think,' said Jack, 'but I am very anxious to see how my horse shapes.'

The six starters were now at the post, and at the second attempt Mr. Watson let the flag go to one of his best starts. Caloola tried to make a bolt of it, but Wells pulled him back with a grip of iron. Hobart made the running past the stand, with Shot Gun, Captain Cook, Rob Roy, Caloola, and Perfection in the order named. Hales could be seen watching the leaders steadily, and Wells held on to Caloola like a ton weight.

'Takes him all his time to hold your horse,' said Lord Mayfield to Marston.

'If Wells cannot hold him no one can,' said Jack.

'He's pulling the brute back,' chuckled Fletcher.

On they went, and past Oxenham's the last pair closed up. Round the back of the course Rob Roy took up the running, and Shot Gun fell back. The order was unchanged until they reached the seven-furlong post, and here the race commenced in real earnest. Hales made a forward move on Perfection, and Caloola followed him, but Wells appeared somewhat uneasy.

'What the deuce is he doing, going up like that?' thought Fletcher. 'Looks as if he meant to win if he can. He daren't serve me a trick like that!'

Rob Roy made the pace a cracker past the sheds. Captain Cook, the outsider, was gradually creeping up. Round the bend Captain Cook led, and entered the straight first, and already there was a dead silence as the unbacked one looked all over a winner.

But the race was not over yet. Hales raised his whip, and Perfection came with a rush, and Caloola caught and passed Rob Roy.

'He'll win! he'll win!' shouted Lord Mayfield excitedly, and Edith Kingdon and Lady Mayfield waved their handkerchiefs.

'Caloola wins! Caloola wins!' yelled the crowd as the big chestnut made after the leaders. Wells, however, was uncomfortable, and Caloola swerved a little.

'Want of condition,' said Marston. 'Ike was about right.'

The distance is reached, and such a Derby has not been seen at Randwick for years. Captain Cook still held the lead, and it could be seen Hales was hard at work on the favourite. Wells made another effort and Caloola got on terms. Captain Cook had the inside running, then Perfection, and Caloola on the outside.

The excitement was intense. On they came and neared the box.

'The favourite wins! the favourite wins!' shouted the frantic crowd.

By one of those masterly efforts for which he is famous Hales at last got Perfection's head in front, and, Captain Cook failing at every stride, he landed the famous blue and white jacket past the post a head in front of the outsider. Caloola was only a length behind the pair, and Rob Roy a good fourth.

'I'm satisfied,' said Jack, as they heartily cheered the winner.

'He did that well,' muttered Fletcher, and he seemed delighted, for he had had a good win.

'He ran much better than I thought he would,' said Ike. 'I can get him a stone better horse than this before the Melbourne meeting.'

Wells was delighted with Caloola, and said if the horse had been sent a few more gallops he would have won, as he gained on the leaders until want of condition stopped him.

Edith Kingdon was rather downcast at Caloola's defeat until Jack Marston assured her it was quite as good as a win, if not better.

Lady Mayfield was delighted at the day's sport, for Wells had tipped her three winners and earned his diamond pin.

In town that night Perfection was installed first favourite for the V.R.C. Derby, and Caloola occupied the second post of honour, and many shrewd men backed him on the strength of the form he had shown. There was general rejoicing at Hawk's Nest that night, and although Kingdon had lost money on the day he was in the best of spirits.

When Smirk and Marston reached the Oxford the former declared he'd never enjoyed himself so much for years.

'Some good in racing after all,' said Marston, with a laugh.

'It's a noble sport,' said Smirk.

'Glad you're converted,' said Jack.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FLETCHER BECOMES TROUBLESOME.

Lady Mayfield enjoyed her new life thoroughly. She found Lord Mayfield a considerate husband, and he was not at all jealous or distrustful of her. Had he been so she would probably have resented it. He managed her admirably, giving her plenty of rein, but at the same time holding her well in check. They got on very well together, far better than could have been expected.

Lord Mayfield was rich, and could gratify any whim Daisy might be troubled with. She had her carriages and servants, and was considered one of the most fashionably dressed ladies in the gay city. She knew how to dress, which some people do not, and she never wore costumes which did not become her.

The Macquarie Street house had become quite a fashionable resort, and many cards were left at the door.

Lady Mayfield, in the midst of the new world she had lately entered, had almost forgotten Fletcher's existence. Her old life seemed a dream of the past, some horrid night-

mare from which she had awakened with a start to find it all renewed. When she thought of those old days, as occasionally she did despite herself, it was with a shudder, and she wondered how she could have lived the life so long.

The night following the races Lady Mayfield was restless. In her luxurious bedroom she sat in an easy-chair before the fire. It was a bitterly cold night for the time of year, and the wind whistled and howled with a melancholy sound. Her maid had left her, and Lord Mayfield was still at his club. She saw faces in the glowing coal, as many hundreds of people had done before. Her imagination ran riot, and memories of the past, anything but fond, crowded in chaotic confusion into her mind. She thought of the time, not so very long ago, when she was an innocent laughing girl. As she thought of all that had followed since, she hid her face in her hands and tears trickled between her dainty fingers. Daisy Mayfield was not a sentimental woman, but all the good, pure feelings of her early life had not been crushed out of her.

Do what she would, the face that constantly looked at her out of the fire was Fletcher's. She had seen him at the racecourse, and he had looked at her with no friendly glance. She wondered he had kept quiet so long. His love of money was inordinate, and she felt sure he would try to wring it from her before long. As yet he had made no move. Lord Mayfield had a hasty temper, and she feared an encounter between them.

She put this unpleasant suggestion aside and wondered how Edith Kingdon could be so gentle and good, brought up in the midst of such a sporting set. She liked Jack Marston. She knew he was a strong powerful man, and strictly honourable. Women like Daisy Mayfield respect such men as these, and she sighed as she thought what a husband he would make.

At last she got tired of sitting up alone, and went to bed. Unpleasant dreams disturbed her rest, and she was constantly waking up with a start.

In the morning she looked pale and weary, and as she glanced at herself in the glass she thought how old she looked. She soon dispelled all traces of her restless night,

and when she joined Lord Mayfield at breakfast, he hardly noticed any change in her appearance.

'I shall be out all day, Daisy,' he said, 'Marston and I are going for a run with the tandem. I want to try the new horses I bought, and Marston's a capital whip; a dashed sight better than I am, at any rate.'

'You seem to be very friendly with Mr. Marston now,' said Daisy. 'I fancy you told me you did not like him once.'

'No more I did. But it was all my fault,' candidly said Mayfield. 'You see, Daisy, I met him at Kingdon's one night, and Miss Kingdon—now don't be jealous—looked so bewitching that I felt rather spoony. Marston took me down properly. 'Pon my word, he sat on me. I was in a towering rage, but I forgive him all that. He's a devilish good fellow, and straight as a gun-barrel.'

'I like him, too,' said Daisy.

'Glad to hear it,' said his lordship calmly. He wasn't the least bit afraid of Marston and Daisy falling in love with each other. 'I must be off now, Daisy,' and he went over and kissed her, then lighted his cigar and strode out of the room.

Lord Mayfield had not left the house half an hour when a servant entered, and said, with a surprised look on his face:

'There is a man in the hall wishes to see your ladyship. Says his business is most important. I would not let him in at first, but he insisted upon my announcing him.'

'Did he give his name?' said Daisy. Her heart was thumping painfully, and she fancied the bad dreams of the previous night were coming true, that Fletcher had at last made a move.

'No, my lady,' said the man.

'Ask who he is and what he wants, Jackson,' said Lady Mayfield. As the servant was about to do her orders, she said: 'Wait; tell him I am busily engaged at present and cannot see anyone.'

'Very well, my lady,' said the man, and as he went downstairs he wondered who the deuce the horsy-looking customer in the hall could be.

'Her ladyship is engaged and cannot see anyone at

present,' he said to Fletcher, for it was no other than 'the Spider' come to try his luck.

'Tell her ladyship I'll wait till she can see me then,' said Fletcher. 'Mention the fact to her that I'm in a devil of a hurry and can't wait long, and here, you, just give her that card.'

Jackson took the card between his fingers, and saw 'Harry Fletcher' on it. The man's language staggered him, and he hesitated what to do.

'Now then, hurry up,' said Fletcher.

Jackson wheeled round with a look of unutterable disgust on his face, and went upstairs with the card as slowly as possible.

Fletcher watched him with a scowl, and thought, 'If I'd you with me, my beauty, I'd make you shift your legs a bit quicker.'

Lady Mayfield took the card, and although she expected to see the name on it, she was almost frightened. She quickly recovered herself, and after a moment's thought made up her mind to see Fletcher and get it over. Turning to Jackson, she said:

'Send the man up. Probably he wants to see Lord Mayfield about some horses. Does he look a horsy man, Jackson?'

'Yes, my lady. He reeks of the stable. Your ladyship had better order me to eject him,' said Jackson, looking ferocious.

Lady Mayfield smiled. She fancied Jackson would not fare very well in an encounter with Fletcher.

'No; no violence, Jackson. I have no doubt you are courageous; but there is no need to show it on this occasion. Send the man up.'

'Yes, my lady,' said Jackson, and he looked relieved at the prospect of an encounter being postponed.

Fletcher was ushered into the room, and Lady Mayfield looked so graceful and elegant in her morning costume, and the room was so beautifully furnished, that even 'the Spider' was somewhat abashed, and he made a bow as she received him frigidly.

'You may go, Jackson,' she said, and that important personage left the room, vowing he would be handy in case of necessity.

'Well, what do you want?' said Lady Mayfield, looking him straight in the face. 'I thought Lord Mayfield had ordered you not to call here.'

'Ordered me!' said Fletcher, nettled. 'A deal of ordering I'll take from a man like him! Don't come the high hand with me, Daisy, or I'll make it unpleasant for you. I've left you alone pretty well. You've feathered your nest nicely, and I want a little of the lining. You treated me d——d shabbily, and I want some recompense.'

'Don't be impudent; I won't stand it!' she said, with a flash of her old temper. 'Remember, I am Lady Mayfield now. If you insult me by calling me by any more familiar name, I will ring the bell and have you put out of the house like the cur you are.'

It was a foolish speech to make to a man of Fletcher's temperament, but Lady Mayfield was roused and did not think of consequences.

'You'll have me put out, will you?' he hissed, as he made a step towards her. 'Look here, my fine lady, if you dare to ring that bell, I'll expose you before the whole of your servants. I'll let them know what sort of a mistress they've got. I'll tell 'em what sort of a life Daisy Fletcher led before she trapped Lord Mayfield.'

'You coward!' she cried, 'you cannot say a word against my life. Keep back, or I shall strike you.'

She looked so dangerous that Fletcher made a backward movement, but he quickly recovered himself, and said:

'Come, let's be friends. I don't want to quarrel with you. I'm hard up, and want you to help me.'

This was a lie, but Fletcher was not particular.

'Not a penny shall you get from me,' she said. 'If you were starving I would not help you.'

'I'll make you change your tune, my fine lady,' sneered Fletcher. 'I've a nicely written letter in my pocket that you would give all you possess to put in the flames of that fire.'

Lady Mayfield looked startled, but she could not think what he meant. She had never given him any letters. In her mad young days she had written a very compromising document; but that could not possibly have reached Fletcher's hands.

'You need not threaten me,' she said. 'I know the value of your word. If money is what you have come for you will get none, so you had better leave my house.'

'Your house! It wouldn't be your house long if Lord Mayfield saw this,' said Fletcher, as he pulled a much-worn envelope out of his pocket.

'And pray what might that be?' said Lady Mayfield contemptuously.

'Only a letter you wrote to ——' said Fletcher.

Lady Mayfield turned white as a ghost, and caught hold of the back of a chair to prevent herself from falling.

'You have that!' she gasped. 'How could you have got it?'

'Won it at cards, my lady. He owed me money and I took this instead. I thought it might come in useful some day. I've kept it a long time, but I see it has lost none of its charm for you. Shall I read it? It may refresh your memory.'

Lady Mayfield had now recovered herself, and she said:

'I don't believe a word of what you say. He was base enough; but he would never have been so bad as that. He told me he had burnt it.'

'Did he? Then he told a lie. A man will do a good many things when he's cornered,' said Fletcher, 'If you don't think it genuine, listen to this,' and he commenced to read: '"My own love." Shall I go on?' he said.

Lady Mayfield did not speak, and Fletcher commenced to read slowly.

It was a rash, impetuous letter, written by a woman who had abandoned all for love, which he read: '"The child is just like you. He's the dearest little mite. He's——"'

'Stop!' cried Lady Mayfield. 'You devil! how did you get that letter? What's your price for it? I know you mean to sell it.'

'Do I?' said Fletcher. 'It's worth a good deal to you, my lady. But where's the dear little boy?'

'Hush, for God's sake!' she cried.

'He's dead. The dear little mite just like his dad is dead. And how did it die, my lady? Can you tell me that?' he went on.

Lady Mayfield covered her face with her hands. Never

had she so bitterly repented her past folly as she did at this hour.

'You killed it, my lady,' said Fletcher.

'It's an infamous lie!' she said. He had roused her at last. 'I would have given my life for the child. The nurse gave it the wrong medicine by mistake.'

'The affair was nicely hushed up, no doubt,' said Fletcher. 'You know all about it, though, my lady.'

'Leave my house!' she said, shaking with passion.

'If I do, it will be to give this letter to Lord Mayfield.'

Lady Mayfield hesitated. At first she thought she would face it out and trust to Lord Mayfield's generosity. But she had already commenced to love him, and she feared the consequences of this exposure of a past she had thought buried and dead with the young life that went out long ago. She must get that letter at any price.

'What will you give me that letter for?' she said quite calmly, although she was trembling inwardly.

'I will give it you in exchange for another,' said Fletcher.

Lady Mayfield looked at him in surprise. She could not make out what he meant.

'You do not want money for it?' she said.

'No; I'll be magnanimous for once,' said Fletcher. He meant to try the 'bleeding' on Lord Mayfield, all the same.

'What do you want me to write?' she said.

'A short note to Wells,' was the reply.

'A note to Wells? Why, what good will that do you?'

'Never mind what good it will do me. Sit down and write as I dictate.'

Lady Mayfield opened an escritoire, and took out paper and ink.

'Dear Wells,' said Fletcher.

'That's too familiar,' said Lady Mayfield.

'Write it, please.'

'DEAR WELLS,

'I have a great favour to request of you. Fletcher will give you this note, and I know that you will do what I ask for my sake. I don't want Caloola to win the Melbourne Cup. I need say no more, but will trust to your kindness to me to carry out my request. If the horse loses I shall

know what to think, and you shall never regret having taken my advice.

'Your true friend,
'DAISY.'

'That's what you want, is it?' she said. 'Well, I shan't do it,' and she tore the letter in two and put it in the fire.

Fletcher looked at her as though he could kill her.

'Write that letter again!' he said.

'Never!' was the reply. 'I'll die sooner than do such a base act. You want Wells to pull Caloola and ruin Marston. I will never consent to it. I defy you, and you may show Lord Mayfield what you will. And listen to me further: I will use what influence I possess over Wells to get him to win the race; and I think you know what a word from me will do. Now you may go.'

'Not till you write that letter, my lady,' said Fletcher. 'I will make you write it, if I have to use force;' and he caught hold of her wrist.

She never flinched as he twisted her arm until it was nearly broken.

'Will you write it?' he said.

'No.'

Another twist. The pain was intense, and a sharp cry burst from Lady Mayfield's lips.

The door flew open, and in another moment Fletcher found himself on the floor, and Lord Mayfield, white with rage, standing towering over him. He had returned for his overcoat, and arrived just in the nick of time.

'You hound! how dare you! Get up!' he said, as he kicked the prostrate Fletcher.

Fletcher scrambled to his feet, and, looking straight at Lady Mayfield, said:

'Will you write?'

'Never!' she replied.

Fletcher put his hand in his pocket, looking at her steadily. He was going to play his trump card, and give the letter to Lord Mayfield to let him read it in her presence.

'I'll give you one more chance,' he said.

Lord Mayfield looked on amazed. He could not understand the drift of the conversation.

'Do your worst!' said Lady Mayfield.

'Read that, and then tell me what you think of her ladyship,' said Fletcher, as he handed the note to Lord Mayfield.

Lady Mayfield sank into a chair, and almost fainted.

Lord Mayfield looked at her, held the letter in his hand, and for one moment hesitated. He saw it was her handwriting.

She gave him a mute glance full of piteous appeal. How she loved him then! Her eyes must have expressed her true feelings, and Lord Mayfield gave her a tender glance.

He turned on Fletcher with an angry gesture of contempt.

'You mean brute!' he said. 'Whatever this may be I know not. It is in my wife's handwriting, I see. I love her and I can trust her. I have no desire to know the contents of the letter, and if you fancied I should read it you are wrong.'

Fletcher looked aghast. He had mistaken his man. He made a snatch at the letter.

Lord Mayfield was too much for him, and Fletcher staggered back from a well-delivered blow on the chest.

'That's what I shall do with this letter,' said Lord Mayfield, as he deliberately tore it in two and flung it in the fire.

With a sudden cry Lady Mayfield threw herself into his arms. 'My love,' she said, 'my own true husband, God bless you!'

Lord Mayfield pressed her closer to him, and kissed her fondly.

'You love me a little, Daisy?' he said with a smile.

'Better than all the world,' she said; and he knew she meant it.

Fletcher was now thoroughly cowed. He saw his game had been lost. He had played his cards badly, and his best trump had been taken. He was 'euchred' at all points.

'Get out of this,' said Lord Mayfield, 'and if ever you set foot in this house again I'll horsewhip you.'

'I'll make you both pay for this!' said Fletcher, as he slunk out of the room in a terrible passion.

'Has that man insulted you, Daisy? Why did you see him?' he asked.

'I thought it would be for the best,' she said.

'Whose was the letter?' he asked.

'Mine,' she replied. 'It was a foolish letter, written in my young days. It was a hot, rash love-letter, and it compromised me. Can you trust me?' she asked, looking fondly at him. 'It was the one fault of my life, and I bitterly repented it.'

'We will drop the unpleasant subject, and never speak of it again, Daisy,' he said. 'But what did Fletcher want you to write?'

'He told me to write a note to Wells, and in it he wished me to say I did not want Caloola to win the Melbourne Cup. He wanted me to get Wells to pull the horse and ruin Mr. Marston.'

'And lose me a heap of cash, too,' said Lord Mayfield. 'But how could you influence Wells, Daisy?'

She blushed as she said, 'I believe I could get Wells to sell his soul for me if I tried.'

Lord Mayfield laughed as he said:

'Poor fellow! I didn't think he was so far gone as that, Daisy. Well, you can use your influence to make him win now. You were a noble, brave little woman to face the danger and not desert your friends. I must warn Marston, though, against Fletcher. That man will do something desperate now. If he cannot get at Wells he'll get at the horse, depend upon it. I know he'll be ruined if Caloola wins the double. Good-bye, darling; I must be off now. Lucky I forgot my coat, was it not?'

'Be sure and tell Mr. Marston to keep Caloola well guarded,' she said. 'How generous of you to burn that letter!' with a look of admiration at him.

'Don't look so bewitching, Daisy. I'd like to burn a letter every day to make you look like that.'

He kissed her and went downstairs. She heard the door bang, and looked out of the window.

Marston sat in the dog-cart with the reins in his hand, and the tandem was soon whirling down the street. Lord Mayfield waved his hand; Marston glanced round and raised his hat, and Daisy was left to her reflections, which occupied her until late in the afternoon.

CHAPTER XIX.

EDITH SEES A GHOST.

FLETCHER, after his defeat by Lady Mayfield, brooded over what he considered his wrongs, and vowed vengeance on the heads of his enemies. In the first sudden burst of passion he felt capable of any madness. He went on a drinking bout, and in the course of a week had driven himself nearly insane. Luckily he pulled himself together in time, and after a day or two's rest he commenced to feel better. How he was to get at Caloola was the question now occupying his mind. Although Wells had assured him, since the race, that he pulled Caloola, Fletcher had his own opinion on that point. He saw the way the horse ran, and his experience taught him that for an animal in Caloola's condition it was a great trial. He shuddered as he thought of the improvement that could be effected in him by November. He had plunged heavily against the horse, and was shares in one or two big books that had laid Caloola to large amounts. It seemed to be an understood thing amongst certain members of the ring that the horse was a 'dead un,' and they 'peppered' him accordingly.

When he fancied he had Wells safe, Fletcher thought 'squaring Caloola' a very easy matter. Now, however, all was changed. Lady Mayfield had far more influence over Wells than he had, and she would exercise it with a vengeance. He growled with rage as he thought how Lord Mayfield had burnt the letter he had so much relied upon.

As he sat in his lonesome room at the 'Spider's Web' he endeavoured to concoct some plan by which Caloola's defeat could be made a certainty. He did not wish anyone else to have a hand in the scheme, for he knew how little confidence could be placed in a confederate. No. What he did must be accomplished single-handed. If he could manage to interfere with the horse's preparation in some manner that would prove fatal to his chances of success, at any rate it would drive him to an outside price in the betting, when he could hedge at longer odds if necessary. Caloola, to be fit,

he knew, must have some strong gallops, and if these could not be given him his chance of success would be small.

Lord Mayfield had related as much of Fletcher's interview with Lady Mayfield to Marston as he thought desirable, and Jack had imagined the remainder. It was clear some evil designs were meditated against Caloola, and both Marston and Kingdon thought it desirable to have the horse's box constantly watched at night.

Willie, the jockey boy, had offered to sleep in the box with the horse, and as Caloola was very fond of him it was decided he should do so. A snug little bed was made up in one corner of the box and railed off so that the horse could not interfere with him during the night.

Caloola had learnt to like the lad, and would have been restless had he been removed.

A week had passed since Fletcher's interview with Lady Mayfield, and Marston thought that after all Lord Mayfield might have attached undue importance to the man's threat. He was, however, uneasy, and the constant fear of something happening to Caloola caused him to have a worried, anxious look, which did not escape the loving eyes of Edith Kingdon.

She taxed him with it, and he told her what his fears were. She endeavoured to console him, but at the same time she felt that Fletcher might be dangerous.

Edith Kingdon's bedroom was at the rear of the house, and from her window she could see the side of Caloola's box. There had been a card-party at the house one night, and Marston was stopping there until morning. As she went up to her room she thought of the man she loved, and the happiness which depended upon Caloola's performances. She looked out of the window—it was moonlight—and glanced at the stables. She sat there meditating for a considerable time, and then went to rest.

How long she slept she did not know, but suddenly she awoke with a start, and fancied she heard a smothered cry. She listened intently. All was still with that weird, unearthly silence peculiar to the dead of night. The room was dark, except for a fitful light from the moon as a dark cloud passed away, only to be followed by another in rapid succession. What should have made her start like that?

She was a sound sleeper, and very seldom given to restlessness. Inside the house all seemed still, and it was evident the visitors had finished their game at cards and retired for the night. She could not go to sleep again, and at last she got out of bed. She did not light the gas, but almost mechanically, not knowing why she did it, she went to the window and looked through the blind.

All was darkness, and she could not peer through it. At last the clouds lifted, and a faint gleam of moonlight shot out. For one moment the scene was dimly illuminated, and Edith saw, or fancied she saw, a shadowy form glide away from Caloola's box. Could her eyes have deceived her? No, there it was, a weird, wild-looking figure, perfectly white. What could it be? She became frightened. She was fascinated, and could hardly take her eyes off it. It did not move, but seemed to gaze at her with bright eyes shining like fiery coals. She felt as though under some mysterious spell, and fancied the figure advanced towards her. As she gazed, almost paralyzed, the mysterious thing vanished as if by magic. The clouds once more obscured the moon, and all was darkness.

Then Edith came to her senses, and the first thing she did was to cry for help. She was in a nervous, hysterical condition, and her maid came running into the room in a fright. The gas was lighted, and she discovered her mistress almost fainting on the floor.

With that remarkable facility in cases of emergency which maids generally possess, she thought to mend matters by screaming, and she did it so effectually that the house was roused.

Kingdon came rushing along the passage in night attire, and Marston put his head out of the door to ask what was the cause of this disturbance.

It was some time before Edith could explain to her father what had happened. She told him of the mysterious figure —ghost she called it—that she had seen near Caloola's box. Her father laughed away her fears, and said she must have been dreaming. 'Why, you actually lay down with your dress on, Edith!' he said.

It was true, for after looking out of the window when she first came into the room, Edith had lain down on the bed

to take a slight rest before retiring for the night, and had fallen sleep.

She was almost satisfied she had been dreaming, only the vision was too real.

'Do go and see if Caloola's all right, father,' she said.

'What's the row?' sang out Jack Marston from the end of the passage.

'Edith's seen a ghost,' laughed Kingdon; 'and it nearly frightened her out of her wits. Moonlight shadows on the blind, I expect it was.'

'Go and tell Jack what I saw, father, and see what he says. I'm all right now. Annie can stay here with me.'

Kingdon went and related to Marston what Edith said she had seen.

Jack did not take it coolly, as Kingdon had done. He at once said, 'It's some of Fletcher's work. Let us go down at once and see if all's right. You may depend upon it Edith saw no ghost.'

'I'll come with you if you like,' said Kingdon; 'but it's a fool's game at this time in the morning. Besides, Willie sleeps there, and he'd have been sure to hear any noise.'

'Never mind that. We'll go and satisfy ourselves.' They went downstairs and out at the back door, taking with them a lantern, as there was no gas in the stables.

'The door seems all right,' said Marston. 'I don't think it's been opened. Let's try.'

Willie generally fastened it inside, but as Marston tried it the latch lifted easily enough.

'That's strange, Kingdon. The lad, I'm sure, usually makes all fast,' said Jack.

Kingdon began to think there might be something in Edith's ghost, after all. They opened the door, and the light shone into the box.

The first thing they noticed was the condition of Caloola.

The horse was trembling from head to foot, and seemed terrified at something. He glanced uneasily around the box, but when Marston spoke to him he was calmer. The horse had evidently had a fright of no ordinary kind.

'Feel his coat; it's quite wet,' said Marston.

Caloola's skin was damp, and sweating as though he had done a gallop.

'It must have been an awful fright he got to put him in that state,' said Kingdon.

'Where the deuce is Willie?' said Marston.

'There he is, fast asleep,' said Kingdon, pointing to the boy's recumbent form.

Marston shone the light on to him, but he never stirred.

'Looks awfully pale,' said Marston; 'he must have had a fright, too. Hello! Willie, lad, what's the matter?'

But Willie never stirred, and they could not hear him breathe.

Marston touched him, and then shuddered and cried:

'Good God! Willie's dead!'

Kingdon looked horror-stricken.

'Are you sure?' he said.

Marston placed his hand over the boy's heart, and could feel a slight flutter.

'There's life in him yet,' said Marston, 'but he must have had a severe shock. Here, give me a hand and lift him up gently.'

They carefully raised Willie up and endeavoured to rouse him. The lad was in a dead faint, for no marks of blows or signs of violence could be seen about him.

'Go and rouse Ike, and one of the other lads, and send straight for the doctor,' said Marston. 'I'll carry him into the house as soon as Ike comes to the horse.'

Kingdon hurried off, and in a few minutes Ike came into the box.

'Good heavens! what's the matter?' he said, and Marston briefly explained what had occurred.

'Why didn't you call me first?' said Ike.

'Never thought of it,' said Jack.

'Both lad and horse have had a terrible fright,' was the trainer's comment. 'They look as if they'd seen a ghost.'

'By Jove, that's what Edith said it was!' exclaimed Marston.

'What, a ghost?' said Ike.

'Yes. A white, weird, shadowy thing with fiery eyes that vanished all at once into the night,' said Marston.

'I only saw a horse frightened like this once before,' said Ike, 'and then he never got over it. It's a bad job, Mr. Marston. It'll do the horse no end of harm.'

'Just look him over, and I'll take Willie inside,' said Marston; and he carried the light form of the still unconscious lad into the house and laid him on the sofa.

The doctor had been sent for, and they eagerly awaited his arrival.

Meanwhile, Ike was making a minute examination of Caloola. He felt him all over, from head to feet, and the only thing at all suspicious that he could see was a slight mark on the horse's near forefoot. Ike examined this intently. He then moved the horse about the box, but he showed no signs of lameness. 'Can't be anything wrong with his legs,' he thought. Then he smelt his mouth, but could detect no signs of anything unusual having been given him.

Ike was not at all satisfied. He could not make head or tail out of this most mysterious affair. That Fletcher must have had a hand in it he felt certain; but what had he done to the horse? Frightened him, no doubt, and that was quite bad enough to an animal of Caloola's nervous temperament. Perhaps the man had been disturbed before he could accomplish his evil design. At all events, he meant to give the horse a good striding gallop as soon as it was light, and see if anything was really the matter with him. Meanwhile, inside the house there was some amount of confusion.

Edith had quite recovered from her fright, although she was nervous still.

Dr. O'Malley, a genial Irish physician, who loved horses, and all their belongings, had driven rapidly to Kingdon's as soon as he was called upon. The 'sporting doctor' he was occasionally named, and he deserved it.

'That lad's had a terrible fright,' he said, after making a careful examination of him. 'He has not been hurt at all. How did it all occur?'

Marston explained as far as he knew what had happened.

'Maybe he'll be out of his senses a bit when he does come round,' said the doctor.

At last Willie showed signs of returning consciousness. He opened his eyes, and stared about him with a wild, scared look. They watched him intently. He seemed to notice no one, but glared right before him with fixed eyes,

He could not speak, but every few moments he shuddered and seemed inclined to faint again.

Dr. O'Malley spoke to him, but the lad took no heed. Willie groaned and grasped the side of the sofa.

'See, there it goes!' at last he said in a startled voice. 'Stop it, stop it!'

He would have sprung off the couch, but the doctor held him down.

'There's nothing there, my lad,' he said kindly. 'Here's Mr. Marston. See, it's all right.'

Willie looked at Marston, but did not seem to recognise him.

'We must get him to sleep, and keep his brain quiet,' said the doctor.

Willie was removed to a spare bedroom, and Edith Kingdon held his hand until the lad dropped off into a fitful slumber.

'What's the matter with him, doctor?' said Marston.

'Shock. When he comes round he'll be able to tell you all that happened in the box as plain as though he saw it at the instant,' said Dr. O'Malley.

'I wonder what he could have seen,' said Jack.

'What he thought was unreal,' said the doctor. 'These lads are superstitious. I recollect a case where a stable-lad was driven clean out of his mind by the ostler acting a ghost in the middle of the night. I hope the horse has taken no harm.'

'By Jove! it's nearly daylight. We'll go and see,' said Jack.

The two walked out to the stables and found Ike getting Caloola ready for his morning exercise. The horse looked frightened, and had evidently not forgotten his night's adventure. He, however, walked out of the box to all appearances sound.

They went over to the course and saw him gallop with the other horses. Caloola had not gone more than a mile when Ike's practised eye saw there was something wrong with him, and shortly afterwards his rider pulled him up, and the horse walked to the gates with difficulty.

'Dead lame,' said Marston.

'Nobbled, sure as a gun!' said Ike. 'How the devil has it been done?'

There was quite a crowd of early morning touts out, and general surprise was manifested at Caloola's breakdown. It seemed as though the horse had gone all to pieces, and just at the critical time when he ought to be sent good, strong work.

Ike examined him again, but could not make out where the lameness originated.

'Strange!' said Jack. 'There's no sign at all about his feet. Is there anything between his shoe and the foot?'

'We'll have 'em off and see when we get home,' said Ike.

Caloola's shoes were removed, but no further discovery was made.

'Send for Storey,' said Marston, and accordingly that well-known vet. was summoned.

He also examined the horse. The near fore-foot took his attention for some time.

'It's here,' he said at last. 'My opinion is that a sharp instrument has pierced the most delicate part. It has been cleverly done, though. By Jove! the foot is poisoned.'

'Sure?' said Ike.

'Quite. Look here!' and he pointed to a small swelling in the frog—a little green patch. 'If that's not stopped, it will get worse. I must extract the poison, if possible. It's the most curious case I've ever had. It's virulent poison, too. I believe it would completely rot the horse's foot in time. Wonder where the brute got it that did such a dastardly trick.'

'The mystery to me is,' said Marston, 'how he got the horse to keep still.'

'Fright,' said Storey. 'I've known horses to be frightened until they dare not move a muscle, but stand trembling all over.'

'Will he get right soon?' said Kingdon anxiously.

'I can hardly tell yet, but I should not exercise him for a few days,' said Storey.

'This means ruin, I'm afraid, Kingdon. They've got the best of us this time. I felt sure there was something afloat when I saw the class of men laying the horse. I'd like to beat them yet. By Heaven, Storey! if you get the horse round quickly you shall be well paid.'

'I'll do my best, Mr. Marston, depend upon it,' he said.

'I'm interested in this case. It's quite out of the common. The poison in that horse's foot is deadly, and I must find out what it is. Leave him to me. I've an hour to spare this morning, and I'll try an experiment.'

'This is a case where Smirk will come in useful,' said Marston, as he went down to Sydney with Kingdon. 'I'll tell him all about it, and set him on the track at once. He's getting rusty, he says, and I fancy this will give him a good chance of exercising his skill.'

The news that Caloola had pulled up dead lame in his gallop that morning had spread like wildfire, and at the club the bookies, or rather a certain section of them, were rejoicing exceedingly. An attempt was made to knock the horse out, but whenever a particularly tempting price was offered, Marston snapped it up. Kingdon followed suit, and between them they steadied Caloola a little. It was evident, however, that the majority thought the first nail had been driven in the coffin, and, as the sporting fraternity would say, Caloola was 'dead meat.'

CHAPTER XX.

AN ANXIOUS TIME.

SMIRK took to the hunting down of a criminal like a black tracker, and he was delighted at the prospect of 'bottoming the Caloola business,' as he called it.

Much to Smirk's disgust, some account of the story had eked out, and paragraphs had appeared in the papers relating how an attempt had been made to kill Mr. Marston's horse, but luckily the design had been frustrated. Those most intimately connected with the stable kept a discreet silence, but they were having an anxious time.

Lord Mayfield put it all down to Fletcher, and so did Wells, but they had no proof. Smirk kept a keen watch on Fletcher's movements, and he failed to discover any signs that could at all assist him in the object he had in view. He had paid a visit to Fletcher's house and pumped all the occupants of the 'Spider's Web' dry. He had made love to the cook, and kissed the housemaid, and

spent at least a fiver in donations. The only return he had got for this was that on the night Caloola's box was entered Fletcher had come home rather earlier than usual, gone to bed, and never got up until breakfast time.

This was all very well, but it did not satisfy Smirk. Fletcher's going to bed early he considered in itself a suspicious occurrence. A man of Fletcher's habits would not take the trouble to go to bed early unless he meant to deceive someone, and Smirk knew it would be easy enough for him to get up again and go out when the household had retired.

Smirk had never been engaged in what he termed a big horse case, and naturally he felt anxious to show that even in such matters he was quite proficient. Having got all he could out of Fletcher's servants, which did not amount to much, Smirk felt he must get at the man himself.

How was he to do this? He cogitated deeply over it, but could find no means of at once carrying out his project. At last he came to the conclusion it would be better for him to bide his time, as this was more likely to put Fletcher off the scent.

But if Smirk could bide his time Ike Thurston could not. It was a case of now or never with Caloola. Storey took great interest in the horse, and, having performed a delicate operation upon him, felt confident of ultimate success. Every hour was precious. If the horse could not do his gallops, it might not only injure his prospects, but throw him back in the market. After three days' absence from the track Ike was permitted to send Caloola gentle exercise without his shoes on. The horse went very sore, and the watchers put him down as a hopeless case for the big Melbourne event.

Jack Marston was anxious, as well he might be, and as Kingdon said they had no chance of hedging even if the worst came to the worst, they would have to stand it all out.

Edith Kingdon also displayed considerable anxiety about Caloola, and no wonder, when her whole happiness was bound up in the horse's success.

She was a regular attendant at the stables, and Storey, the vet., said she had a more quieting influence over the horse than any potions he could administer. This is often

the case. A woman comes in useful where a man and medical science fail. Caloola seemed to have an idea no harm could happen to him when Edith Kingdon was present. He trusted her, and his big, intelligent eyes glanced wistfully at her when she left the box.

The horse had been fearfully frightened, there could be no doubt about that. Even now he got severe turns, and would occasionally break out into a sweat. He started at any sudden sound, and glanced nervously round when the door of his box was opened.

Ike found a peculiar interest in studying the horse's demeanour.

'I must get something to quieten him, or he will be as bad-tempered as ever he was. He wants company, that's what he wants. I wonder if a cat would suit him. I'll try,' he muttered, as he went and pounced upon Miss Kingdon's pet tabby. It was no good. Caloola would have neither cat nor dog in the box with him, and seemed to detest all living things.

One day Ike had left the door of the box open in an unguarded moment, and the yard door leading into the street was also ajar. When he returned he found a goat in the box quietly nibbling the straw bedding, and Caloola looking on with evident signs of pleasure.

'Whew!' whistled Ike; 'it's goat you like, is it, my beauty? Well, this beggar, whoever it belongs to, shan't get away.' He closed the door and left the goat with the horse.

'I've made a discovery,' he said to Jack Marston later in the day.

'What is it?' said Jack. 'Found out who tried to nobble the horse?'

'No, not yet,' said Ike; 'but I've found out what will quieten Caloola and ease him a bit in his mind.'

'The deuce you have! What is it?' said Marston, surprised.

'A goat,' solemnly said Ike.

'A what?' said Marston.

'A goat. A real live brute: not much to look at, but a devil to eat, like the rest of his tribe, I suppose,' said Ike.

'That's curious. Fancy the horse taking to a goat! Are you sure they're good friends, Ike?'

'Certainly; come and see.'

They went to the box and opened the upper half gently. Sure enough, they were good friends. It is marvellous how one animal will sometimes calm another. A cat has been known to pacify the most excitable horse; and a dog has often proved effective.

Caloola was lying down taking an afternoon nap, and the goat lay close beside him with its shaggy head on his body. They looked a curious, but perfect picture.

'This beats all I ever knew,' said Marston. 'He must have that goat with him all the time, Ike.'

'Yes, he must, and, what's more, that goat goes with him to Melbourne, and in the same box, too. If he loses that goat now he'll go frantic.'

'Whose is it?' said Marston.

'Don't know, and don't care,' said Ike. 'It strayed into that box, sent, I believe, by a direct dispensation of Providence; and there it stops.'

When Kingdon heard this he was highly amused, and, although he had not much faith in the 'goat cure,' he had in Ike, and so he let the matter drop, with a smile.

Poor Willie! There was no question of a goat curing him. The lad had been wandering ever since the fright he received, and, although the doctors gave ultimate hope of his recovery, they considered it would be some time before he was convalescent. The lad had remained at Kingdon's house all the time, and Edith refused to allow him to be moved. She felt certain that when he recovered his reason he would be able to dissolve much of the mystery at present connected with that night's adventure.

It was an anxious time for all parties connected with Caloola during that fortnight. The horse, however, gradually got better, and about three weeks before the Melbourne meeting Ike considered it quite time for him to be removed with the others to Flemington, in order to have the wind-up gallops on that track. Fletcher watched the progress of the horse with keen eyes. He saw Caloola had made considerable improvement, but he was still confident the horse could never win the double, or even one race. He advised the bookmakers with whom he was connected, and in conjunction with whom he did a lot of shady work, to keep

on laying the horse, as it was all right; he could never be thoroughly wound up, and he agreed to stand in with one of the heaviest layers against him.

Fletcher seldom made a mistake, and those men knew it. They felt quite secure in following his advice, and kept laying Caloola until the market became very queer against him.

Smirk, who had by this time become pretty well *au fait* with racing men and their ways, watched Fletcher's proceedings with a wary eye. He knew the man would never act as he was doing if he had not good cause to think the horse could never get right. Had Fletcher a confederate, or had he done the trick himself? Smirk was inclined to think Fletcher was too cunning a hand to have anyone else meddling with his business.

At last he made up his mind. He would have a chat with Lady Mayfield on the subject. It was a delicate matter to broach with her, but when Smirk was determined he did not stick at trifles. He meant to bottom this business, and he thought her ladyship might be able to put him on the right track. He told no one of his intentions, but having watched Lord Mayfield leave the house, he ventured to call, and asked to see her ladyship.

She was surprised at his visit, but she thought it could do no harm to receive him.

When Smirk mentioned the nature of his errand, Lady Mayfield was perplexed. She hardly knew what to think. Contrary to Smirk's expectation, she took the matter very coolly, and he could not help thinking of the note he had made in his pocket-book, 'Lady M. dangerous.' He knew in an instant she hated Fletcher, and thought the man had some hold over her still.

She explained Fletcher's character, and laid bare his faults to Smirk's attentive ear. From her he learned of the bitter animosity existing between Fletcher and all connected with Jack Marston.

He learned more. She told him such a romance about the proceedings at the 'Spider's Web' as actually made Smirk elevate his eyebrows, a thing he never did except upon special occasions.

He stayed fully an hour. Her ladyship was delightfully

condescending. He had never felt so much at ease with a woman before.

'If you want to find out all about it, go to the "Spider's Web" some night,' she said.

'Don't know Fletcher well enough,' said Smirk.

'Go disguised,' said Lady Mayfield.

'Had thought of that,' said Smirk, 'but it won't do. Can't get an introduction.'

'You will not want much of an introduction if you have plenty of money,' she said.

'Never have plenty of money, your ladyship,' said Smirk. 'More love than money in our profession.'

'I will give you some, if you will take it,' she said. 'You are sure to lose if you play there. At least, you will have to do so if you desire to get what you want.'

'I could not think of taking the money,' said Smirk.

He didn't half like the notion of accepting notes from such a charming lady.

'Nonsense, Mr. Smirk! I want you to carry out the game to the bitter end. That man ruined my life to a certain extent. He is the bane of my existence now. I want him out of the way. Mr. Smirk, I will give you five hundred pounds if you rid me of that man.'

Smirk once more thought of that note he had made in his pocket book. He saw her ladyship's eyes flash with hatred. 'Murder in those eyes,' thought Smirk. He hesitated for a moment, and then said:

'That alters the case, my lady. As your most obedient servant I am willing to accept the cash, but must really do something for it. I don't want to accept it as a blind.'

'Do you call it a blind,' said Lady Mayfield, 'when I offer you the money to rid me of this man? Wait a moment and I will tell you; then judge for yourself. When I meet that man in the street I shudder; I feel a death-like chill pass over me; he looks at me with murderous hate in his eyes. I am sure he would kill me if he dared; he watches me perpetually; he haunts my slumbers; he is the hideous reality in every dream; he comes between me and my husband—one of the most forgiving, and to me the noblest, of men. This man would wreck my life, again defame my name, and drag me down to the depths of infamy

from which a kind and loving hand has raised me. You are a detective!' she continued with excitement. 'You have met many criminals in your time, and many women, such as once I could have been. I am not wholly bad; I have fallen once, but, as I have a soul to be saved, only once. Shall that fatal sin be a blot upon my whole life? Is there no penitence to wipe it out? Cannot I live now as pure and good a life as though that other life had never been? Sometimes I fancy I am two women. I look in the glass and I see a vision that makes me shudder. Then I look again, and I see a coronet upon my brow, and I am Lady Mayfield, a peeress of England, a member of that aristocracy of aristocrats.' She said this proudly, and Smirk thought she was fit to be a queen. 'Happiness is not for me,' she moaned; 'I am haunted by a horrible shadow, a bitter memory of the past, which lives in that man. Help me to get rid of that shadow. Hurl him from my path. I am rich, powerful; I will make you a wealthy man. Give me peace of mind, a husband's love, perhaps a mother's fond affection. All this is within my grasp but for one man. He stands in the way. Rid me of him, I care not how. Kill him!' she hissed between her teeth as she sank on to the sofa.

Smirk looked at her with admiration. 'Wonderful woman!' he thought. 'Egad! she's another Siddons. Hang it, she's a regular Cleopatra!'

'Lady Mayfield, you excite yourself unnecessarily,' he said. 'Fletcher can never cause you all this uneasiness. However, I will accept your offer, and if I can I will rid you of him; at any rate, for some years. If he has done the job I expect he has, he'll get it hot.'

'Take no notice of my wild words,' she said; 'I was nervous, excited. I am afraid of the man. He is so silent, and that is dangerous. He has not applied to either myself or Lord Mayfield for money for weeks.'

'I will track him down, your ladyship. The thought of giving you a moment's pleasure will urge me on,' said Smirk.

'And they told me you were not a ladies' man, Mr. Smirk,' she said, with a bright smile.

'I'm not, your ladyship, only on special occasions. You

are one of those special occasions, your ladyship. Believe me, I do not flatter.'

'I do believe you,' she said seriously. 'I have a presentiment that man will kill me,' and she shuddered as she spoke.

'Not if I know it,' said Smirk. 'He shan't harm a hair of your ladyship's beautiful head.'

Smirk left shortly afterwards, and he had a 'snug' cheque in his pocket.

'I'll "jug" him, sure as his name's Fletcher. I'll go to the "Spider's" haunt to-night, and if I can't learn something there, why, hang it all! I'll cut the cloth and turn parson.'

CHAPTER XXI.

SMIRK IN THE 'SPIDER'S WEB.'

SMIRK was a determined man. He had promised Lady Mayfield he would track the 'Spider' to his lair, and he meant to keep that promise.

He ruminated over the project, and at last hit upon a plan. The only objection Smirk had to the plan was that it was not his own, and therefore was capable of failing. He never could believe that one of his own well-worked-out schemes could fail, but he had a supreme contempt for the plans of other people. Marston, however, hit upon the present idea. Smirk was to assume one of his numerous disguises, and act the insipid, weak-minded, moneyed young man just arrived from England. Wells was to introduce Fletcher to Smirk, and give the 'Spider' ready hints as to the utter brainlessness of the young man from the other side of the globe, and also let him know plainly enough that he had plenty of spare cash. Wells was to account for knowing Mr. 'Talbot' by stating that he was a friend of Marston's whom he met at Kingdon's, and that would be quite enough to edge the 'Spider' on to 'rook' him. Any friend of Marston's that he could get into his clutches would be sure to receive small mercy at the rapacious Fletcher's hands. That 'master of arts'—black arts—would stick to the unfortunate Talbot like a leech, and suck him quite as dry.

And so it came about that one day Smirk, *alias* Talbot, accompanied Wells to Tattersall's.

No one would have recognised Detective Smirk in the flaxen-haired, insipid, almost idiotic young man, evidently on friendly terms with the crack jockey. The man's whole appearance was changed. Even his eyes looked blank, although a keen twinkle might be noticed by a careful observer. His clothes were of the latest cut, and quite dandified. He had a flower in his button-hole, an unlimited supply of cuff and collar, a pair of yellow kids on his delicate hands, and a light swish cane he twirled about with a nervous air.

To see Wells with a young noodle like this was to at once jump to the conclusion that the jockey had got a 'real good thing on.' Fletcher fell into the trap almost immediately. As soon as Wells had got rid of Talbot, Fletcher came across and asked him what he had got there, jerking his hand in the direction of the bar, where the youthful insipid individual was gently imbibing some concoction just prepared for him.

'Looks as if he'd come out of a band-box,' said Fletcher.

'So he has, and a neat sort of band-box it is,' said Wells. 'The fellow rolls in money, and it is about a pound to a Derby mount that he could come out of fifty band-boxes if he wanted. He's just out from England, and I picked him up at Kingdon's the other night. Believe he is a great friend of Marston's.'

'Oh, he is, is he?' said Fletcher. 'I should like to have the honour of his acquaintance if that is the case. I'm particularly partial to friends of Mr. Marston. Introduce him to me, and I'll ask him to join us at a little card-party to-night. Just a few choice friends, you know. You come, Wells. There'll be some good sport with this "joker."'

Wells saw Fletcher had readily taken the bait, and he made no hesitation in introducing the stranger. He went over to Smirk, who was still standing at the bar, and gave him a hint that all was right. They went across the room, and Wells introduced him to Fletcher.

'Happy to meet you, sir,' he said. 'I'm always glad to know Mr. Marston's friends. Can you spare time this evening to come over and have a little dinner with me? I shall

have a few friends there, and if you like we can have a friendly game at cards afterwards.'

'Just what I should like,' drawled Talbot. 'No ladies there, I hope. They always spoil sport.'

Fletcher winced. If there was one part of his life he was sore about, it consisted in the flight of Daisy.

'No,' he growled. 'I've done with women. Once bitten, twice shy. You need not be afraid of meeting any petticoats at my house.'

'Glad to hear it,' said Talbot. 'Presume you have had a disappointment, Mr. Fletcher. Was she pretty? Deuced bad taste to jilt you, I'm sure! She couldn't have known the friendliness of your disposition. Here am I, a perfect stranger, at once invited to your house merely because I have the good fortune to be a friend of Mr. Marston's.'

'Let's drop the subject,' said Fletcher. 'It's a matter I do not care to talk about. Be sure and come to-night, Mr. Talbot. We dine at seven. Shall be most happy to see you. Wells will bring you to the right place.'

'Thanks; I will be there,' was the reply.

The thread of a story is occasionally broken by some slight explanation, a brief, and what may appear egotistical, remark on the part of the author. I may say here, and it will come in here just as well as elsewhere, that many of my characters are men I have known. It may appear to the uninitiated—and perhaps some who are not, strictly speaking, 'in the sporting world,' may enjoy reading these lines—that my characters are mixed in a most extraordinary manner. That rank and poverty go hand in hand, and that noble men, honest men like Jack Marston, and divers others persons, associate and converse upon intimate terms with jockeys, trainers, bookmakers, 'legs,' and such-like personages. They do. I acknowledge such to be the case. But it is true to life. Nothing levels all ranks more than racing. I have seen the haughtiest of 'swells' cringing almost to a crack jockey, and feeling safer when they had his willing ear. I have known bookmakers who have seated at their dinner-tables some of the flower of the English aristocracy, and at the same time trainers and jockeys have had their legs under the mahogany. If such things be true, and I assert they are from personal observa-

tion, then I must take the material as I find it, and work it as skilfully as I can in my humble way, in order to please and, I trust, interest my readers.

Some purists may deny that any instruction of a useful nature can be gleaned from the turf, or a tale of the turf. Wait patiently until I have finished, and I think no one will gainsay that there is plenty to learn, and that it can be learnt with safety. There are good and bad people in all walks of life, and Heaven knows there are enough of the latter on the turf, but I have, I am proud to say, met some noble, great-hearted men who make racing a pastime. Their code of honour is strict, and their morality would never be doubted. Jack Marston lives at the present day, and who will deny that he bears the hall-mark of gentleman? Pardon the slight digression. As I explained before, it is merely to explain to the uninitiated what they may consider curious, namely, the close association of characters so diverse.

Punctually to time, the fictitious Talbot and the jockey Wells arrived at Fletcher's. The 'Spider' was on his best behaviour. He could do the thing well when he felt inclined, and to-night he wished to make a favourable impression. The dinner was calculated to please the most fastidious appetite. The wines were undeniable, and the company looked select. They were a small party, six in all, but quite enough for a merry evening.

Conversation flowed briskly, and it became much more free as the champagne was uncorked.

'Mr. Talbot, you do not appear to drink much wine,' said Fletcher. 'I can assure you it is the very best brand, and the vintage is undeniable.'

'I never drink much,' said Talbot. 'I'm afraid my head is rather weak. Still, this is really splendid wine. Thanks, I will have just another glass,' he said as Wells filled up again.

Dinner finished, a quiet chat over cigars ensued; and racing, of course, was the principal theme.

Lal Sherwin was one of the party, as usual, and the other two men were acquaintances of Fletcher's, and at a glance it could be seen they were not the genuine article.

'Much of a racing man, Mr. Talbot?' said Fletcher.

'No. I'm anxious, though, to go in for the game a little. My friend Marston has a deuced good horse. I've backed it for a lot of money for the double. He says it's a certainty, and so does Kingdon; and our friend here,' pointing to Wells, 'rides. It must be good enough to win or Marston would not have told me.'

Fletcher laughed, and it was not a pleasant, mirthful laugh either.

Had anyone been looking closely, they would have seen Mr. Talbot eyeing Fletcher with peculiar interest behind a cloud of cigar smoke, all over the top of a double eyeglass. It must have been the laugh that startled him.

'I hope for your sake, Mr. Talbot, the horse will win. I presume it is Caloola you mean. He's a good animal, but for all that I don't fancy him. You see, he's been lame, and gone back in his training, and that's bad. I should advise you to have a bit on Captain Cook; that's the horse for my money,' said Fletcher.

'What about Corisande? He ought to go pretty near in the Cup,' said Sherwin.

'He's well in; six years old, with only 6 st. 12 lb.,' said Fletcher. 'Not a bad horse as a three-year-old, but he's lost all his pace now. It would have taken a clinker to beat Caloola had he not been stopped in his preparation, but it's all over with him now. I've trained the horse, and I know him. He's a nervous brute, and he'll show his temper now.'

'Wonder how the deuce that blackguard lamed the horse?' said Talbot suddenly.

'Lamed the horse? What the deuce do you mean?' said Fletcher, and Sherwin looked at the innocent young man with queer eyes.

'Why, you know,' said Talbot, blowing a cloud in the most unconcerned manner, 'some beast of a fellow got into the horse's box in the night, lamed the brute and half killed the jockey, and frightened the horse nearly to death. Surely you must have heard about it?'

'Yes, I heard something about it,' said Fletcher; 'but I never got full particulars. Must have been a smart fellow to have got at the horse like that.'

'Miss Kingdon saw the man in a white sheet or some-

thing in the garden. She says she could recognise the figure, but not the face, as it looked so ghastly white. The doctor, however, says the lad Willie, if he recovers his reason, will be sure to identify the man,' said Talbot.

Fletcher turned pale, but it was hardly noticeable.

'He did it,' thought Mr. Talbot Smirk; 'I'll bet my bottom dollar to a ham sandwich he did it.'

'It must have been Miss Kingdon's imagination,' said Fletcher. 'A man would never be such a fool as to risk that when the thing could have been done much easier.'

'I pity the fellow if Jack Marston finds him out,' said Sherwin. 'By Jove! I'd like to see the meeting between 'em. Why, Jack wouldn't leave him a whole bone in his body. He'd flog him till his hide looked like raw beef.'

'I believe that fellow Smirk is on the track of the man, said Talbot. 'He's a deuced smart fellow, too—one of the best "D.'s" in Scotland Yard.'

It was evident Fletcher did not like the gist of the conversation, as he got up and proposed a game at cards.

They played cards, and the party soon discovered that, if Mr. Talbot looked a flat, he certainly was not one. He held his own well, and so it was found necessary to resort to the usual schemes then in vogue at the 'Spider's Web' for men who would persist in winning fairly. Talbot then commenced to lose. He kept his weather-eye open, however, and managed occasionally to defeat their little game.

'Let's have another smoke and a drink of something refreshing,' said Sherwin, who was losing all and didn't like it.

He never objected to 'being in' at a game himself, but he knew that on the present occasion he 'stood down.'

Fletcher made some slight objection, but at length reluctantly left the table.

This was right into the detective's hands. He didn't want to lose much money, and he did not want to kick up a row.

With the natural perversity of such innocent youths as Talbot, he at once commenced to talk about 'nobbling' Marston's horse. Fletcher tried to turn the conversation, but the more he harked off the scent the surer he was drawn back again.

The bottle was passed round several times, and the conversation became brisk.

'It's my opinion,' said Talbot, 'that the fellow who "nobbled" that horse knew all about the place, Caloola, and everything else.'

'Nonsense,' said Fletcher. 'How could he? Surely none of Kingdon's men would do it.'

'I mean that perhaps some of his old hands who had a spite against him might have done it,' said Talbot, with a side-glance at Fletcher.

'By Jove! I never thought of that,' said Sherwin. 'Some of those fellows you had in the stable with you, Fletcher, were not over-particular.'

'D—— it! What do you mean?' said Fletcher angrily. 'The men I had about me were quite as good, if not better, than those Thurton has got. You might as well say I did it myself. It's just as likely.'

'You're always losing your temper, Fletcher. It's a deuced bad plan,' said Sherwin.

'I'm sure I did not wish to wound your feelings,' said Talbot. 'It seems such a curious affair, however, that there must be some personal spite at the bottom of it.'

'Can't think how it was done, myself,' said Wells. 'I saw the horse's foot, and not a sign about it. Storey, the vet., told me in confidence, and I believe he told Ike, that the horse's frog had been pierced with a poisoned instrument. He said it must have been a real deadly poison, because it took him such a deuce of a time to get it out, and it was lucky he could do it at all.'

'He has got it out, then?' said Fletcher anxiously.

'He says so,' said Wells; 'but I fancy the horse is not right in the foot yet. He don't gallop like he used to.'

This was not quite true, but Wells had his object in saying it.

'Not him,' said Fletcher; 'he'll never get it out. When I was in New Caledonia I had a horse got his foot poisoned, and he died from it.'

'You've been in New Caledonia, then?' said Talbot.

'Yes, I had some horses in training there,' said Fletcher.

'Rum place, I should imagine,' said Sherwin.

'Should just say it was. I never want to go there again,' said Fletcher.

'I wonder if Marston knows the horse's foot was poisoned?' said Talbot.

'Fancy he does,' said Wells; 'but Storey said he did not want to alarm him, and kept the serious nature of the injury to himself. He thought it right, however, that Ike and myself should know.'

'I'm glad you do know,' said Fletcher, 'for you can do Mr. Talbot a good turn by telling him Caloola cannot possibly win.'

'But I fancy he will win, after all,' said Wells.

'Not a ghost of a chance,' said Fletcher. 'The poison's too deadly for that; it never fails,' he mused, as if in an absent frame of mind.

'What poison?' said Talbot, in a loud voice.

Fletcher started as though he had been shot. The voice sounded quite different. He feared he had heard it before, and under not very pleasant circumstances. He looked hard at Talbot, who was gazing up at the ceiling in the most unconcerned manner.

'What poison!' stammered Fletcher. 'Why, the poison in the horse's foot, of course; didn't Wells say the vet. said it was "deadly poison."'

'Oh, ah! yes. I forgot all about that. Thought it was a funny remark of yours, that was all,' said Talbot.

'Don't see much fun in it,' said Fletcher. 'We'll drop the subject. I'm full of the d——d horse. I wish the brute was dead.'

'No doubt you do,' thought Talbot and Wells.

No more cards that night. Fletcher was uneasy and anxious, and evidently desirous of being alone. At last the guests departed.

As Wells and Smirk (I may now call him by his own name) walked homeward, the detective said:

'He did it, safe enough. Now I must find out how to trap him.'

'Who did it?' asked Wells.

'Fletcher,' was the laconic reply.

'Nonsense,' said Wells.

'Gospel,' said Smirk.

'He's a blackguard,' said Wells.

'Ready-made,' said Smirk.

'I'll stiffen the beggar before the Cup's over,' said Wells.

'The man or the horse?' said Smirk.

'The man,' said Wells.

'That's precisely what Lady Mayfield wants you to do,' said the wily Smirk.

'Did she say that?' said Wells in a low tone.

'She did, honour bright,' said Smirk.

Wells made no answer, and Smirk knew the jockey was on the right side of the Caloola book.

CHAPTER XXII.

ON THE TRACK AT FLEMINGTON.

It is not by any means an easy journey for a man, unaccompanied by such encumbrances as ladies, let alone horses, from Sydney to Melbourne. When a trainer has one or two restive animals under his charge his anxiety may be more easily imagined than described. He must be ever on the alert to see that nothing wrong happens to the horse or horses in the boxes, and occasionally, even with the most careful supervision, a horse will get cast in his box by some unaccountable means. Again, the change of trains at Albury is a great nuisance, and many a good horse has been fluttered and excited during the process. Some thoroughbreds can hardly be got to enter a horse-box, and when, after much coaxing and enticing, one gets inside, his antics are quite in the acrobatic line. The first jolt of the train will throw him off his balance, and cause him to wonder whether he is on his head or his heels.

With such a horse as Caloola it was an anxious time with Ike when he had to take his precious charge to Melbourne. He had not much fear of not accomplishing the journey safely, but, still, he would have been glad had it all been over. Ike's character must be pretty well known by this time, and my readers will acknowledge that he does not lack determination. Now, no man can be a successful trainer of horses without he possesses determination, and a good deal of it. At last the eventful morning arrived when the hope of Hawk's Nest, and the champion upon whose

victory so much depended, was to take his departure for the scene of battle.

Willie was as yet too unwell to accompany Ike, and this was another loss, because the lad understood the horse, and, what is still more, the horse understood him. Firefly and Matchboy were to go with the crack and assist him in his work at Flemington.

The horses arrived safely at the station at Redfern, and they attracted quite a small knot of spectators. Probably the goat, with its shaggy coat, trotting gently alongside the slashing chestnut, caused the people to turn round and stare somewhat perplexedly at the unusual sight. It was the first time, no doubt, a racehorse had had such a companion in his box, and Ike and the lads were considerably chaffed about it.

'What's he entered for?' said one young urchin, pointing scornfully at the 'Billy.'

'Same race as you, my lad, the "Mother's Milk Stakes,'" said Ike, with a broad grin.

The youngster slunk back discomfited, and the bystanders had a laugh at his expense. Not much use trying to chaff Ike. He never lost his temper, and he had always a sharp answer ready.

Caloola, when he saw the goat quietly nibbling some dainty morsel in the box, walked in without much trouble, although he tried the boards well with his feet as though he was stepping on hot bricks. He sniffed around the box and closely inspected his companion, and at last came to the conclusion he had better make the best of it. It was his first experience of a horse-box, and he didn't appear to like it. The other two horses got in without any trouble, they being old hands at the work.

When once started, the long tedious journey to Albury was made without misadventure. Marston and Kingdon, who had been down to the station to see them off, told Ike he should put up at Albury for the night, and accordingly, when he reached there, the horses were taken round to the Royal Hotel.

Early next morning several people had got wind that the sensational horse Caloola, for such he now was, had passed the night at the Royal, and quite a levée assembled to do

him honour. The incidents connected with Caloola's temporary lameness had, as usual, eked out, and people were chary to believe that the horse could have got well and sound again in so short a time. As Caloola went to the station it could be seen that he showed no signs of lameness, and he looked such a splendid specimen of a thoroughbred that many a man vowed he would carry his pound if fit and well on the day.

At last Newmarket is reached in safety, and the horses are once more out of their boxes. Not much notice taken of them this time. People in this locality are too accustomed to see racehorses of all descriptions for it to be a novel sight to them. Consequently the trio walked quietly down to the stables which had been rented for them, near the famous Flemington course. Comfortably ensconced once more in a spacious box, with luxurious bedding up to his knees, Caloola appeared to feel at home. Next morning Ike took his charges to the Flemington track.

It was Ike's first visit to the celebrated course, and although it took a good deal to surprise him, he opened his eyes wide as he looked around.

Randwick he had thought a fine course, but Flemington he fancied surpassed it, although he altered his opinions afterwards when he had had a few days' experience of the foggy mornings and the somewhat curious nature of the various tracks.

However, he sent Caloola gently on the tan, and the horse moved freely and well. There were numberless watchers and hangers-on about, although it still wanted a fortnight to the races. The appearance of the new trio caused various rumours as to what they were.

'What's that?' said a horsy-looking fellow.

'That's Caloola, Jack Marston's horse,' said a shrewd, thin man.

'Oh, that's Caloola, is it? Rum story about him, isn't there? Some fellow tried to lame him, eh? Fine-looking horse, and backed for a ton of money, I hear. What sort of fellow is this Marston? We don't know much about him this side.'

'You soon will do!' was the reply. 'Take my tip, you have a bit on Caloola. He's a real good un, and when his party plank the stuff down it's generally a moral.'

'Who's the party?'

'Kingdon and Co.'

'Whew!' and the man reflected awhile before he said: 'Yes, they're a dangerous crowd, and I think I'll take your advice. Does Fletcher train this horse?'

His companion looked keenly at his questioner as he said: 'No, he doesn't. Fletcher is a deadly enemy of Marston's, and I believe would do anything to injure him.'

'Whew!' came again from the man; 'Fletcher's a dangerous cuss. Had me nicely once at cards when I was a bit better off than I am now. The "Spider," we used to call him. What's his cognomen in Sydney?'

'You've hit it first pop. "Spider" Fletcher's his name. But what do you know about him?'

'It's rather a long story, if I tell it you all, but to cut it short I may as well say that the first time I heard of him was in connection with a mysterious affair at Collingwood. I was a journalist then, and did the rounds of the police court. What struck me about Fletcher's case was that I'd have sworn he was guilty of the crime he was charged with, because I detected the look of the man the moment I saw him.'

'Not much evidence, that, of his guilt.'

'Perhaps not, but I fancy it was instinct. D—n it what's that horse doing!' he exclaimed.

'He's often like that. It's a mere nothing. Playfulness, that's all.'

'Well, I'd rather the lad ride him than I.'

Caloola had been standing on his hind-legs pawing the air furiously when the conversation was interrupted.

'Please go on with the tale,' said the man.

'Let's see. Where did I leave off? Oh, I know. Well, Fletcher was tried for poisoning one of his mates. Nothing extraordinary in that, you will say. But the circumstances were peculiar. The man had been poisoned externally not internally, if I may use the expression. The stuff had been pricked into his arm. It was, so the medical evidence said, a rank poison distilled from herbs found in the South Sea Islands.'

'Eh, what's that?' said his listener with a start; 'are you certain about that? Sure it was poison in the arm?'

'Yes, of course,' said the ex-journalist. 'But what does that matter to you? You seem mightily interested in the man.'

'Oh, a mere trifle! I fancied I had heard a yarn like that before.'

'Well, the fellow got off. No trace of this poison could be found to afford a clue as to who did the murder. Fletcher was as cool as a cucumber throughout the whole proceedings. But I'd bet my life he did it.'

'So would I,' was the startling reply.

The ex-journalist stared at his queer companion as though a thunderbolt had fallen at his feet.

'And who the devil are you?'

'Card, sir.'

'Christopher Talbot Smirk.'

'Yes, that's it.'

'Well?'

'I know Fletcher. I'm on the track.'

'Yes, you're on the track, there's no mistake about that. But courtesy for courtesy. I can't afford cards now, but my name's Dick Bodon.'

'Mr. Richard Bodon, I kind of like you. I'm a Scotland Yard detective, and I'm death on Fletcher.'

'Why?' said Bodon.

'That's my secret at present, but you shall know it all in good time; and it may be worth your while to let me know where you live,' said Smirk, for our old friend the detective it really was, and a good disguised tout he looked.

'A letter left at the Bull and Mouth will find me,' said Bodon.

When Smirk got home after his visit to the 'Spider's Web,' as recorded in the last chapter, he thought over what move he should make next. He thought until he fell fast asleep, and then he had a dream. What that dream was he has not told the writer of this story. Smirk can keep his own counsel. The result, however, was that he packed up his trunks, made tracks for Melbourne, and appeared on the course at Flemington the first morning Ike's team were out. Smirk knew it would be upon the racecourse that he should hear most about Fletcher, and as luck would have it, he stumbled across the right man at once.

Smirk was delighted. He invited Bodon to dine with him, and, as might have been expected, considering the state of his finances, that worthy was nothing loath to accept the offer. Bodon looked at his companion curiously, and Smirk smiled.

'Don't look much like a *D*, do I?' he said.

'No, by Jove! you do not, and I've seen a few of them in my time. I like you, Mr. Smirk. There's something so darned comical about your appearance, and this peculiar meeting, that I'm blessed if I couldn't write a good sensational article about it,' said Bodon.

Smirk looked daggers at him.

'Don't be a fool,' he said. 'It is essential that the matter should be kept dark. If you can't hold your tongue you and I had better part at once. If you "blow the gaff," by the mother of Moses I'll be down on you some of these days!'

'Don't get excited, my good fellow,' said Bodon. 'I know which side my bread is buttered on now. I didn't at one time. Used to eat all the stale part and leave the butter for someone else, but times have changed since then. Couldn't lend me a sov. or two, could you, old man? There's no starving wife and family at the end of it. I merely wish to feel the exquisite sensation once more of having a quid or two in my pocket.'

'So you shall, my boy. Here's a couple of pounds for you, and, mind, don't get the other side of the line, or you'll be sure to let something out. Hush, here's Ike. I wonder if he'll know me. Hi, Mr. Thurton!' he called out as Ike strolled past.

Ike turned and looked at the comical figure addressing him, and nodded his head. He was about to proceed on his way when Smirk said again:

'Ike, I want to speak to you.'

He came back and looked hard at Smirk.

'I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance,' he said.

'Oh yes, you have,' grinned Smirk. 'Knew you well in the old country, when you were stud-groom at Squire Drayton's.'

'The devil you did!' said Ike, now fairly astounded.

'Yes; and I also knew a chap called Smirk, an intimate friend of Squire Drayton's, and a good fellow to boot.'

'Was he?' said Ike. 'Well, I don't know so much about that. Detectives are generally a sly lot—never mind their own business, and are always poking their noses into other people's.'

Bodon nearly burst out laughing, and Smirk, unable to retain himself any longer, said:

'Hang it all, Ike, don't you know me? I'm Smirk.'

'That may go down all very well at home,' said Ike, 'but I've learnt a wrinkle or two out here. You need not try any of your little games on with me. I don't know you from Adam.'

Smirk was nonplussed.

'Ike,' he said, 'here's my card. It's the solemn truth. I'm really made up for the occasion, and I seem to have done it remarkably well.'

'Not a bit of it,' said Ike. 'I recognised you the minute I came close to you. Glad to see you, Mr. Smirk. Business, I presume, down here?'

Ike had not recognised Smirk, but he did not mean to let the latter get the better of him.

Smirk felt angry. To be thus sat upon by a mere trainer before a broken-down journalist was too much for him. He smothered his wrath, because he knew it would have no effect upon Ike, and said:

'Most important business has brought me down here, and I should like to have a chat with you, Ike.'

'All right; come and have breakfast with me. Who's your friend?'

Another upset for Smirk's dignity. Bodon did not look a particularly desirable acquaintance. He had a little appearance of being something between a bailiff and a pawnbroker's assistant. Still, there was something in the man's face that showed he was honest, and could be true to a friend.

'This is Mr. Richard Bodon, journalist,' said Smirk.

'Always thought these newspaper chaps were a seedy lot,' said Ike.

His experience of them was mostly derived from those abominable turf loafers hanging about the training tracks in the old country touting for the newspapers; a very different class of men to those to be found chronicling the doings on

an Australian track—men of ability, uprightness, and integrity; men whom the author is proud to number amongst his friends.

'You're pretty rough on me,' said Bodon; 'I'm a misfortune, a big mistake, that's what I am. Seedy, certainly, I grant you, but my heart's in the right place.'

'Is it?' said Ike. 'Never knew newspaper men had any heart. Once travelled in a railway carriage with one who had just been to the scene of a murder, where a brute of a man had cut his wife and child's throats. The beggar was scribbling away as fast as Caloola can gallop nearly, and I asked him what he was up to. Said that was his business, but if I particularly wanted to know he was just hashing up the remains of a murdered wife and child, and giving a description of the delightful father for the delectation of the readers of the *Police News*.'

Bodon laughed as he said:

'All men to their business, but I don't think we are all as callous as that fellow; at least, I know I'm not.'

'He's death against Fletcher, and knows the "Spider" well,' said Smirk.

'Anyone that dislikes that man can put his legs under my table for half an hour,' said Ike, 'so you can come along to breakfast with Mr. Smirk.'

Bodon felt he was in luck's way. Going to breakfast with the trainer of the redoubtable Caloola, and with a Scotland Yard detective! 'Quite enough of an adventure for one morning,' he thought. He cordially accepted Ike's invitation, and the horses having done their work, the trio went towards the house.

As they sat round the well-filled table a stranger looking in would have thought they were queer companions. Fate does throw curiously opposite people together, and it had done so on this occasion. Fate was being worked out over Ike's breakfast-table that morning, and the object of Fate was 'Spider' Fletcher.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FATE STILL WORKING.

SMIRK and Bodon left Ike Thurton's as soon as they had discussed the capital breakfast provided for them. Ike had his work to do, and he plainly told them that their room was better than their company after the talk was over, and he had learned all about Smirk's meeting with Bodon. He easily divined why he had not mentioned anything about Caloola's lameness to the man, and appreciated him for his reticence.

Smirk, knowing Ike's peculiarities, made no remark about the abruptness of their dismissal, but his companion did so, and characterized Ike as 'a boor.'

'Nice thing to call a man after giving you a breakfast like that,' said Smirk. 'I can assure you Thurton is one of the best fellows in the world.'

'But I wanted to get the straight tip about Caloola,' said Bodon.

'If you stayed there till doomsday he would tell you nothing,' said Smirk. 'Thurton can hold his tongue, and that's one thing I admire him for.'

'You can tell me, I have no doubt,' said Bodon. 'Is the horse worth backing?'

'I've told you so before, and I won't repeat it. Please yourself,' said Smirk.

'Then the two sovs. you gave me go on him for the double when I get up town, just for luck,' said Bodon.

'You're a rum un,' said Smirk, 'but do as you like.'

When they arrived in town Smirk went to his comfortable quarters at the White Hart Hotel, and told Bodon to meet him there at dinner-hour.

'I must have a little time to find this matter out,' thought Smirk; and when he had shut himself in his bedroom and locked the door, he lay down to have what he called a real good think.

Smirk's thinking boded no good to Fletcher, and Fate was busily at work weaving a web that it would be difficult even for the 'Spider' to get out of. The detective's considering-

cap was on. He thought: 'If Fletcher used poison in the Collingwood murder case it was probably the same dangerous concoction he had used upon Caloola's foot. How did the poison act, that is the mystery. It was evident Fletcher did not intend to kill the horse outright, but merely to lame him. Then, how had the veterinary surgeon discovered it, and how abstracted it? That did not matter so much. First of all he must look up the report of the murder case, and have his man identified. Then, well, if it was really Fletcher, he fancied he saw a way of clearing him out of Lady Mayfield's path, and earning her undying gratitude. It mattered not the object Fletcher had in murdering this man. The question was, how was it done? Then he would hunt out the doctor who gave his opinion about the poison, and learn all he had to say about it.

Smirk felt by this time he had his work cut out, so he got up and went to the *Argus* office. Here he speedily found, on searching the files, the case he wanted, and most interesting reading it was. As he read on, Smirk felt he was coming to the bottom of a discovery. He had never yet been able to fathom Lady Mayfield's connection with Fletcher, nor how she could possibly have bound herself to such a man. He must have had a terrible hold over her; or else she could never have tolerated his presence. Smirk read on. It was a long case. He forgot all about Bodon at the dinner-hour. There it was in print, and Smirk saw, not only what he had come to find out, but far more.

He discovered that this man Fletcher had deliberately got rid of his victim because of the passion that victim's wife or mistress inspired him with. 'Must have been his wife,' thought Smirk, 'or he'd never have killed the man.' The victim's name was Frederick Miguel, and it appeared he had been separated from his wife—so it was said she was—for some months. This Miguel's past history was given, and he had evidently seduced the girl at Fletcher's instigation, and the 'Spider,' wonderful to relate, had afterwards himself become a victim to her charms and longed to possess her. It was proved the two men had quarrelled over this woman. Another important fact was that Mrs. Miguel could not be found, and Fletcher's chief defence was that she herself had poisoned Miguel. A point which told well in Fletcher's

favour was that Mrs. Miguel's child had died in a mysterious manner, and an inquest was held upon it, the doctor's evidence being peculiarly uncertain.

Smirk turned up the inquest. Verdict, 'Death from natural causes.' A comment was added, not by the jury, that the interesting appearance of the mother had no doubt something to do with the verdict. This was tantamount to saying Mrs. Miguel should have been committed for trial.

'By Jove!' muttered Smirk. 'If Lady Mayfield should be Mrs. Miguel, that comment on the verdict would be a powerful weapon in the hands of a man like Fletcher, now she is married to Lord Mayfield. What a terrible *exposé* it would be—more than a nine days' wonder. I'd like to be in it if it was anyone but Lady Mayfield,' he went on. 'Fletcher's safe. That verdict of acquittal has done him. How did he get her to live with him? Could it be possible he had held over her head the threat that she had murdered her husband and child? Quite possible in a woman of her temperament,' thought Smirk. 'What a fearful life these men must have led her!' he mused. 'In the clutches of two scoundrels, one capable of murdering the other to possess her, and then holding the threat of murder over her to induce her to live with him. She could never have believed Fletcher guilty of the murder of Miguel, or at any cost she could not have lived under the same roof.'

The mystery seemed beyond Smirk even. How could it be cleared up? Lady Mayfield could do it, but he would not apply to her.

'You seem interested in that very peculiar case,' said a voice at Smirk's elbow.

'Very,' was the reply.

'Perhaps I may be of service to you,' said the new-comer. 'I reported that inquest, and wrote the comment on that verdict I saw you looking at.'

'Indeed, sir! Then you may be of service to me. I am anxious to find out the truth of the matter.'

'As a friend of the lady's or the man's?' said the reporter.

'The lady's, certainly,' he said.

'Then I am at your service.'

'What, after writing that comment?' said Smirk.

'Yes, after writing that, even.'

'Can you throw any light upon the matter?' said Smirk.

'What do you want to find out?' said the reporter.

'Who the lady is, and where she is now,' said Smirk.

'It is rather a long story, but if you care to hear it I will make it as brief as possible.'

'We'll adjourn,' said Smirk, and the pair went to the nearest hotel, where, over a glass of good whisky, the reporter gave the following version of the affair:

'It is some five or six years ago. I must take you back to give you a fair idea of the events that transpired in connection with this case. At that time I was doing work in my father's office at M——. I became acquainted with a young lady of good birth and education, and a most attractive personal appearance. We fell in love. The usual story: She found someone else she liked better, and I received my *congé*. I never quite forgave her for it; she did it in the most heartless manner. It was a long time after that before I saw her again. I came to Melbourne and entered the office where I am at present employed, the *Argus*. One afternoon I was walking up Collins Street, when I met the woman I had so fondly loved. I hesitated a moment, and then spoke to her—I called her by her Christian name, Daisy.'

Smirk gave a slight start, and his companion hesitated.

'Go on, please,' said Smirk.

'She stopped, looked hard at me, and then turned pale as death. She clasped her hands, and I thought she would fall. I endeavoured to reassure her, and asked her if she were happy and married.

'"Happy—married," she said bitterly, and there was a world of untold misery in these two words.

'Then the past flashed across my mind. I remembered we had once loved. I recollected the time when we were all in all to each other. She looked beautiful now, but aged, and the expression of her face was sadly changed. I offered to assist her in any way that lay in my power. I asked her to trust me if she had any secret she could confide in me. I felt she knew I could be trusted. She was about to speak, when a dark, Italian-looking man came across the road and addressed her. He was a splendid fellow. Such a handsome man I think I never saw before. She gave him a

glance full of concentrated hate and passion. I had never seen her give such a glance before, and it struck me with a sudden terror as to what she might not be capable of doing if goaded to desperation.'

'So it did me,' said Smirk.

'You know her?' said his companion, surprised.

'I fancy so. But please proceed.'

'She went away with that man without so much as a look at me. I think she must have been afraid of him. I never saw the man again. I thought I would see her father. I obtained leave of absence, and went to M—— that night. I saw the dear old man, almost broken down with grief. Misfortune after misfortune had come upon him. He related a pitiful tale of how his daughter had been seduced and ruined by an Italian named Count Miguel, and how a man named Fletcher had been the means of communication between them. When he found out the truth, he swore an oath that this Miguel should either marry his daughter or die. He had an interview with the supposed Count, and the upshot of it was he paid the scoundrel five thousand pounds and saw her legally married to him. He then tried to get his daughter to leave the man and live with him. She was infatuated, and would not do so, and left the church with her husband. From that hour to this he had never seen her. I then gave him an account of our meeting, and offered to try and get his daughter back if possible. Two days afterwards I went to the coroner's office as part of my ordinary work. I thought I should have fainted as I looked at the list of inquests. "Arthur Miguel, aged two years, suspicious death." I got leave to attend that inquest. I never received such a shock in my life. Daisy Miguel, for so I will call her, was there. She looked proud and defiant, and even smiled at me. The horror of such a thing in such a place! I felt as one in a dream throughout the inquest. My practised mind could tell the evidence was clear against her; but I could not believe her guilty. The verdict was a surprise, but I fancy the coroner and everyone else was satisfied with it. As Daisy left the court I whispered in her ear, "Is this horrible charge true?" "It is," she answered. "Then you are an utterly abandoned woman," I said. She made no reply, but walked away. Burning with indignation,

I went to the office, and I added that comment to the verdict of the jury. It was wrong to do it. I had no right to do it, and I was deservedly censured for it. When I had cooled down, I would rather have cut my right hand off than write such a thing again. I never saw Daisy from that day to this; but I found out she did not kill the child. The child was poisoned, and with the same venomous extract the man Miguel was killed with.'

'Who did it?' said Smirk.

'The father—Miguel himself. I must mention that at this time Miguel and Fletcher were well known on the turf. The former ran horses as Count Miguel, and the latter trained them. They were, however, in partnership. I was desirous of becoming acquainted with these men, but I could only manage to meet Fletcher, and we became, to all outward appearances, friends. One night he got very intoxicated, and went fast asleep in the room at the hotel, where we had been having a carouse. I saw a letter fall out of his pocket on to the floor. I picked it up. I may have been wrong, but I read it. It was addressed to Miguel. It seems the worthy pair had quarrelled about their spoils won over the horses. I read, and became horror-struck. The words burnt themselves into my brain like fire, for they proved the innocence of the woman I had loved—ay, and, God help me! love still. I read:

'"If you don't agree to my terms I'll split. You —— the child, and you know it. Beware how you thwart me, Miguel, for you know I can be dangerous."

'I meant to have kept the letter, but just as I put it back into the envelope Fletcher awoke with a start. I let it fall on the floor, and feigned sleep. He pulled me about, after he had picked up the note hurriedly, and thought I was drunk. Then I heard him curse himself for leaving the envelope open. With muttered oaths, for he was in a half-maudlin state still, I heard him swear he would have his revenge. "She shall be mine!" he muttered. "Curse her! she can't escape me. She thinks she killed the child with the laudanum? Ah! ah! ah!" he laughed. "Laudanum. Not a bit of it. Took it herself, poor devil! to deaden the pain that brute gave her. Curse him! I'll have revenge, and Daisy shall be mine. Can't leave me

once I get hold. I'll make her think she killed him. Same stuff, eh? She'll sleep well enough, and then find him gone." Then Fletcher pulled a small phial from his pocket and looked at it lovingly. He went out and left me. I got up with a start. Should I inform the police? No. It was merely the ravings of a madman. I got with more friends that night. It was pouring wet. I went home soaked, and lay down in my damp clothes. Fever followed, When I got up, after two months' illness, Miguel was dead. Fletcher had been before the court and was acquitted, and had thrown, or tried to throw, the blame on Miguel's wife, Daisy. What could I do? To relate the words uttered by Fletcher would have made people laugh at me. I let the matter drop, and I heard that Fletcher was in Sydney with his wife, whom I took to be Daisy. Then I went abroad as travelling correspondent, and have but lately returned. That is the sad tale, so far as I know.'

'A thousand thanks,' said Smirk. 'Your name, sir, if you please?'

'Reginald Hatherstone.'

'You have done me a great service,' said Smirk; 'how can I repay you? You would not object to give evidence against this man, Fletcher, at any time?'

'Certainly not. That's if it will not injure Daisy,' said Hatherstone.

'Can't possibly injure her,' said Smirk. 'She's out of reach of all harm.'

'Dead?' said Hatherstone solemnly.

'Yes, she's dead. Has commenced her new life. Let's hope she may be happy,' said Smirk.

'Merciful heavens! I hope so. When did she die?'

'She's dead to her past life,' said Smirk. 'She lives in her new one. She is beloved and loves, honoured and respected. Meet me at Flemington on Derby Day, and I will show her to you.'

'If she is happy I am contented. Cannot you tell me more?'

'Not now—as soon as possible. I can tell you she never married Fletcher, if that will ease your conscience. She doesn't know he killed her husband. I think she must have wormed it out of Fletcher who killed the child. We

shall never know what she has gone through. She has such an easy conscience she cannot have done much harm, and if Fletcher had a great hold on her now he would quickly let her feel it. After what has happened recently, he will find I have a grip on him.'

'And who may you be, sir?' said Hatherstone.

'Christopher Talbot Smirk, detective, Scotland Yard. Come and dine with me. By Jove! that blessed Bodon will be mighty hungry by this time;' and Smirk laughed at the thought of the ex-journalist waiting some hours for his dinner.

'Dine with you? Certainly. You're a strange man.'

'Think so?' said Smirk. 'Come along.'

They were quickly at the hotel, where Bodon had been cooling his heels and solacing himself with spirits for a couple of hours or more. Matters were explained to his satisfaction, and the sumptuous repast put him on good terms with himself. The business of the afternoon was not alluded to by either Smirk or Hatherstone.

As Hatherstone left at night, Smirk walked with him a few yards, and then said:

'Good-night, Mr. Hatherstone; you've done me a great service. Back Caloola for the double.'

'Eh! What?' said the surprised Hatherstone.

'Back Caloola for the double. *Au revoir*,' and Smirk was gone.

'Of all the strange experiences I ever had, this licks creation,' said the journalist to himself as he walked homewards. 'That's the rummiest tip I ever got. Back Caloola for the double. The "straight office" from a Scotland Yard detective for the Melbourne Derby and Cup. I can't miss that. I'll plunge. I'll have a fiver on it in the morning, if I live on bread and water for a week after it.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BIG SWEEP.

MELBOURNE'S swarming with humanity. It is the week before the Cup, and every sporting man in Australia knows what it means. It would astonish, and it does astonish,

English racegoers when they see it for the first time. There's no mistake about Melbourne; it's all there. The elements of a big city are found here to perfection. The Victorian capital is at this time filled with visitors from all parts of the colonies—New South Wales, Queensland, New Zealand, South Australia, all send their contingents to swell the vast throng. Many familiar faces, perhaps not seen for years, can be met with in Bourke Street.

I will not weary my readers with a lengthy description of Melbourne at present, although, for the sake of my English readers, I must give some idea of the great capital at race times later on. Amongst the arrivals in Melbourne were Lord and Lady Mayfield, Jack Marston, Kingdon and his daughter, and Sherwin. Lord Mayfield had taken a beautiful villa at St. Kilda for the race carnival. Smirk saw their names in the paper, and at once made his way to Ravenswood House. After the revelation he had heard, Smirk felt curious to see Lady Mayfield once more. Could this gay, dashing woman, who appeared to have no troubles in this world, be the Mrs. Miguel of whose history he knew so much? As he walked along Bourke Street, Smirk pondered over the story he had heard. He felt, nay, he knew, it to be true. He had never been able to fathom a woman yet, and now he confessed he was farther out of his depth than ever. There was such an air of refinement about Lady Mayfield, he could not imagine she had spent the early years of her life amidst scenes of debauchery and crime. And yet it must be so. Heaven help Lord Mayfield, and more especially her ladyship, if he discovered the whole truth. Fletcher, Smirk felt assured, would hardly dare to tell Lord Mayfield his wife's past life.

But there were other ways of doing these things. Anonymous letters asking him to refer to certain newspaper dates, and pointing out the coincidences. Smirk felt he must act promptly in regard to Fletcher. He would wait until the racing carnival was over, because he did not want to cause any unpleasantness at such a time, and Fletcher's arrest would involve others. Besides, as Caloola was right again, half the desire for vengeance had gone. Had the horse been so lame that scratching him was a necessity, he would have swooped down upon Fletcher like a hawk on to a

heron, and carried him off to durance vile without delay, so that the man should not enjoy his ill-gotten gains. Proof against Fletcher he had in plenty, but whether he could get a warrant for his arrest upon the evidence he could produce was another matter. It was a strange story, and might be looked upon with a certain amount of incredulity. Smirk felt that he would have regarded such a tale with suspicion, and yet he felt it was true as Gospel. Facts are stranger than fiction, and so Smirk decided to let Fletcher alone for a time. It was a fatal mistake, as after-results proved, but detectives are not infallible, and Smirk felt he was acting for the best. When he reached Lord Mayfield's house at St. Kilda, he asked for Mr. Marston, who was staying with them, as also was Edith Kingdon, and in a few moments was shaking hands heartily with him.

'Shall I tell him all?' was the first thought that flashed across Smirk's mind. A moment and it was gone, and he determined to keep quiet.

'And so, Smirk, you have been making discoveries down here, have you?' said Marston.

'Ike told you, I presume, about my meeting with Bodon. Curious, was it not? Yes, I think I have Fletcher safe; but I shan't take any steps until after the races, because it would only cause unpleasantness.'

'Quite right,' said Marston. 'We can afford to let the rascal have his liberty a little longer. I mean to prosecute him, however, because a more dastardly act was never committed.'

Smirk joined the party at luncheon. The conversation over that uninteresting meal was formal, but Smirk, for the life of him, could not keep his eyes off Lady Mayfield. How charming she looked—the picture of health and happiness! She seemed even younger than Edith Kingdon, who was, probably, eight or nine years her junior. It was evident to Smirk, who was a pretty keen observer, that Lord Mayfield was desperately in love with his wife, and he believed she returned his affection.

Marston and Lord Mayfield went to see Ike after lunch, and Smirk, who had accompanied them to the hall-door, where Lord Mayfield's dog-cart awaited them, was left to his own devices.

'I'll have a chat with her ladyship,' he thought. 'I must report progress with regard to Fletcher. Wonder if I can give her a hint that I know all about her past life. Perhaps I'd better not. I'll just see how the land lies.'

He returned, and knocked at the drawing-room door.

'Come in,' said her ladyship.

He knew the voice, and entered.

Lady Mayfield was alone, and this was opportune.

'Miss Kingdon has got a slight headache, and has gone to lie down,' she said. 'I know you are a good entertainer, Mr. Smirk; so perhaps you can prevent me dying of *ennui* for half an hour or so.'

'I'll try, my lady. I've been on your business here principally, and I think I shall soon have accomplished all you desired me to do,' he said.

'Thanks—a thousand thanks. I'm not safe until that man is removed out of my way,' she said.

Her eyes flashed, and Smirk thought, 'That's the kind of look Hatherstone noticed.'

'I've got valuable information that will convict him of "nobbling" Caloola,' he said; 'but I have got more than that. Would you like to hear what I have against him, my lady?'

'Certainly,' she said eagerly.

'I have information that would hang him for a certainty,' he said slowly, looking straight at her.

Lady Mayfield was reclining in a luxurious arm-chair, toying idly with her fan. As Smirk said this she raised the fan to her face, and thus he lost sight of its expression. Had he seen it he would have been startled. There was deadly terror in her eyes, her mouth twitched nervously, and then, what Smirk did see, a shudder ran through her whole frame.

'I'll bet my life that fellow Hatherstone told me the truth,' he thought.

A few moments, and Lady Mayfield lowered her fan. Her face was pale, but calm.

'How close it is!' she said. 'Please open the windows, Mr. Smirk.'

He walked across the room, and did as she asked.

'What a horrible thing for you to say, Mr. Smirk! Bad as the man is, I am sure he never committed——'

'Murder,' said Smirk.

Again the shudder. Her ladyship was evidently highly nervous.

'How fearful!' she said. 'But we will not pursue the subject further. I don't want the man hanged; I merely want him out of my way.'

'He would be very effectually out of your way if he were hanged,' said Smirk. 'I've hanged better men than the "Spider." I shouldn't mind hanging him a bit.'

'You don't mean to say you have hanged a man?' said Lady Mayfield, startled.

'Half a dozen,' said Smirk coolly.

'You wretch!' she said, looking at him with horror.

'You misunderstand, my lady. I haven't hanged the men myself. It's out of my line. I mean I have run men to earth, and my evidence has sent them to the gallows.'

'That's quite bad enough,' said Lady Mayfield. 'How can you do such things?'

'Matter of business, you see,' said Smirk. 'Your ladyship seems to have cooled down about this man?'

'I hate him!' she said.

There could be no mistake about the truth of this assertion. The way in which she said it proved that from the bottom of her heart she would have been glad to hear of Fletcher's death.

'I'm not going to make a move until after the races,' he said.

'That is quite right,' she replied; 'and now, as you have reported progress, Mr. Smirk, our interview can end. How are the funds? I am satisfied with what you have done. If you need more, they are at your disposal.'

'Not at present, my lady. I will ask you for more when necessary. You are too liberal,' he said.

'Not at all, Mr. Smirk. I feel perfectly safe in your hands. Do you believe in the old saying that "Murder will out"?' she asked abruptly.

'Yes,' said Smirk; 'most emphatically I do.'

'And so do I,' she said, as she gave him her hand and bid him good-afternoon.

'Murder will out!' thought Smirk. 'By gad! she's a clever woman. I believe she knows I've got at the bottom of that Miguel business. What a pity it is she's Lady Mayfield! She's a decided loss to the female branch of our profession. Great Scott! how she would have pumped some of our swell London cracksmen.'

As Smirk went home to the hotel he passed Fletcher nearly opposite the Victoria Club. The 'Spider' did not see him, as he was in earnest conversation with one or two men evidently of his own stamp.

'What devil's game are they up to now, I wonder?' thought Smirk.

In the meantime Marston and Lord Mayfield had arrived at Ike's house. They had a look at the horses, and found Caloola as fit as hands could make him.

Lord Mayfield went into ecstasies over him, and said the double looked a moral.

'He's pounds better now than he was at Randwick,' said Ike. 'I've not bustled him; he's had long, strong work. I've not left the race on the track, as some of the beggars have. We've got a bad one to beat in Corisande, a six-year-old, with a light weight. The horse can gallop, and has done a real good preparation. I expect Wells and Kingdon down for tea. Will you gentlemen stay and join us?'

'With pleasure, Ike,' said Jack. 'Will you, Mayfield?'

'Certainly,' said Lord Mayfield.

'We can then have a chat over the coming events,' said Ike. 'I must say I think we have a splendid chance of winning if the horse stands.'

'What,' said Marston, 'is there any danger of a break-down?'

'If the Derby is a desperate race he might "crack-up,"' said Ike. 'He's a bit tender on that foot yet. That brute Fletcher ought to hang for this job.'

'We *must* run him in the Derby, Ike. Our fortunes depend upon it. I'll wire for Storey to come over in case of accidents. I've known lame uns win many a good race.'

The trio went inside, and had a chat over a cigar and a glass of wine.

'How much do you stand to win over this affair, Marston?' said Lord Mayfield.

'About fifty thousand over the double. It's too good to come off, I'm afraid. When I say that, I mean that is the amount Kingdon, myself, and Ike have about it. How much have you going?'

'I took the odds to win me five thousand,' said Lord Mayfield.

'Fair wager if it comes off,' said Ike. 'I think you never had a better chance of a big win in your life, Mr. Marston.'

'I hope you are a true prophet, Ike,' he said. 'Hullo! Here's Wells and Kingdon.'

Mutual greetings, and a conclave was held to prepare the plan of campaign. Wells was sanguine of success, and said no horse could move better in his gallops than Caloola.

'I'm a bit afraid, though, Mr. Marston. That fellow Fletcher will do me some injury if he can. I wish you would get a second mount. If I win the Derby on Caloola he'll be fit to shoot me. I know the man. He's dangerous now. It's his last chance. If Caloola wins the double he's ruined.'

'Never fear, Wells; he'll not harm you,' said Marston. 'If you fear anything of that sort I'll have him locked up.'

'He's too big a coward,' said Ike.

'Here's a telegram for you, Ike,' said Marston, as he took the wire from the lad, who handed it through the window.

Ike put it down on the table and signed the book. Then he leisurely tore it open and read it.

'Great heavens! What a strange coincidence! Read that, Mr. Marston,' and for once in his life the imperturbable Ike became excited.

Marston read aloud as follows:

'You have drawn Caloola in the fifty-thousand-pound sweep. Hearty congratulations.

(Signed) 'GEORGE ADAMS.'

'Hurrah!' shouted Lord Mayfield, flinging decorum and the British peerage to the winds, as he capered round the room.

'Well done, Ike,' said Kingdon, as he gave him a hearty smack on the back.

'I'm as glad as if I'd won the race,' said Marston.

'Don't lay off a red cent,' said Wells.

'What a piece of luck! By Jove! it is curious, Ike,' said Jack. 'I suppose it is the first time a trainer has drawn his own horse in such a big sweep. You should hedge some of it, Ike, if we win the Derby. Make sure of a few thousands, at any rate.'

'You're all in with me at this,' said Ike.

'Not a bit of it,' said Lord Mayfield.

'How many tickets had you in, Ike?'

'Two,' said Ike.

'Oh, Lord,' said Kingdon, 'I'd about fifty chances. Well, such is luck!'

'I wonder what they'd think of a big sweep like that in the old country, Ike? They would hardly believe it; and yet look at the hundreds of thousands of pounds going through these sweeps out here. I call it simply fabulous, and it shows what a horse-loving people the Australians are. £50,000 in a sweep! Why, they'd say you were mad if you mooted such a thing in London.'

'So they would,' said Ike. 'If I tell 'em at home I drew the horse I trained in a £50,000 sweep they would never believe it. If you won't stand in, I'll lay Wells 2,000 to nothing the double, and 1,000 to nothing if he wins the Cup. I shall lay Tom Bates a thousand to one sov. straight out, and I've got the coin on my watch-chain yet, so he won't have to part if he loses. Will you do me a favour, Mr. Kingdon?'

'Certainly, Ike; what is it?'

'Let me lay Miss Kingdon a thousand to nothing for a wedding present,' said Ike.

'You shan't do anything of the kind, Ike,' said Marston and Kingdon in a breath. 'You well deserve all you get if the horse wins. We shall have plenty without it,' said Marston.

Ike looked disappointed as he said:

'I only want to make you a wedding present, Master Jack.'

It had come out again, 'Master Jack.' The tears stood

in the old trainer's eyes as he looked at the man he had danced as a lad on his knee—'Master Jack,' the first boy Ike had ever taken to. He had taught him to ride and drive, and had given him hints about horses that had made the lad have more knowledge than men twice his age. And now 'Master Jack' refused his offer. It cut Ike to the soul. He looked at Marston with a mute, piteous appeal that reached Jack's heart. There was something here the others could not understand, but if ever a man had the respect of his fellows, Ike had it when the big tears stood in his eyes as he said 'Master Jack.'

Kingdon felt a choking sensation in his throat; Lord Mayfield coughed uneasily; Wells fidgeted in his chair; Marston jumped up and caught Ike by the hand.

'You're the best-hearted man that ever lived, Ike. Lay Edith the thousand with pleasure, and she shall receive it from yourself. Say no more about it, Ike. Gentlemen, Ike Thurton is my best and oldest friend. He was my father's friend before I was born, and I honour and respect him as he did.'

Ike was overwhelmed. All he said was:

'Don't say any more about it. I'd die for "Master Jack" any day.'

'I know you would, Ike,' said Jack, as he once more gripped his hand.

News spreads, and in town that night it eked out that Ike Thurton had drawn Caloola in the big sweep.

'More cursed luck,' growled Fletcher. 'The fates are dead against me. I feel certain that brute will win the double. I'll have one more try at Wells. We could afford £5,000 if he lost the race. He'd want the money posted, though, at once. Couldn't do that. D—— it, I'll try and frighten him into it.'

CHAPTER XXV.

FLETCHER TRIES WELLS.

THE 'Spider' had not been in an enviable frame of mind since his arrival in Melbourne. For one thing, he hated Melbourne. It had been the scene of certain incidents he

would have liked to blot out of his memory for ever. It may appear curious, but Fletcher had a conscience, and a plaguey trouble it was to him. Cowardice might perhaps be the better word. Fletcher's conscience frightened him terribly at times. His past life, now that he was once more in Melbourne, came vividly before him. He was constantly meeting people he did not care to see. Probably they had by this time forgotten his existence, or even if his face recalled a passing memory it was quickly lost again in the vain endeavour to recollect where he was last seen. And yet the 'Spider' had played a prominent part in tragic events which occurred not many years ago. In this busy world people have no time to store in their memories such incidents as Fletcher was connected with. At the time they may have made a vivid impression; but in the press o business they soon fade away and vanish. And yet there were people who, to Fletcher's great annoyance, recollected his past life, and were constantly reminding him of it.

A word dropped here and there, a hint, a cunning look, or an expressive wink, told Fletcher that he was well remembered in certain quarters. As it is the business of some people to forget, so it is of others to remember. In the sporting haunts he frequented he was well known, although it was some years since he had visited these scenes. Fletcher had found it convenient to remain in Sydney when the Miguel affair was over. Melbourne had become too hot for him. His connection with Miguel was well known, and although he was acquitted at the trial, there were many people who had a firm belief in his guilt. All the men who knew him intimately, and had had transactions with him, swore the 'Spider' had 'done for his mate.' They shunned him accordingly, and so Fletcher crossed the border and made his home in Sydney. Was it fate drawing Fletcher to Melbourne this time? An irresistible chain of circumstances had made it necessary he should once more visit the great city. He was loath to come. He tried to get out of it. He shuffled in every possible way. The man seemed to feel an inward dread of this trip. When the train pulled up in Spencer Street Station he positively shuddered and felt half inclined to return the same night. But he was too deep in the mire, and he was not alone.

Had he been so, he would probably have floundered out of it in a manner peculiarly his own. The bookmakers who were standing heavily against Caloola, on Fletcher's recommendation, stuck to him like leeches. He could not get out of their clutches. For once in his life Fletcher had met his match. He felt so certain Caloola would lose that he had made Messrs. Isaacs and Moss lay the horse to lose many thousands more than they otherwise would have done. These sons of Israel were determined Fletcher should see them through.

When Caloola went lame they were all smiles, and promised the 'Spider' a heavy commission on their winnings. But matters had changed now. Caloola was not lame. He was galloping, sound as a bell, and his place in the betting had been restored. This looked ominous. What did it mean? Knowing the wily, fox-like cunning of their dear friend the 'Spider,' Messrs. Isaacs and Moss determined he should come to Melbourne and settle the matter more effectually. They knew Fletcher had some hold over Wells; he had told them so in confidence, and had hinted that even if the horse got right the jockey was safe. Doubly secure in this, Messrs. Isaacs and Moss peppered Caloola to their hearts' content. But they were decided upon one thing, and that was they would have their full pound of flesh out of Fletcher if all did not turn out right, and Caloola won. They had hinted this plainly to him, and Fletcher had now become desperate. Wells must be got at somehow. That was undoubtedly the best way of settling the difficulty.

Fletcher had arranged for an interview with Wells, and he knew how much depended upon it.

Wells thought it best to decline to see him, but at Ike's suggestion had agreed to an interview, in order to draw what he could out of the 'Spider' as to his plans.

They met at Fletcher's hotel, and the 'Spider' greeted the crack jockey with great effusion. It was a sporting house, and Wells often visited it. There were many surmises as to what he could have to do with Fletcher, whose character was also well known. 'Looks bad for the Caloola crowd,' thought the frequenters of the Silver Flagon. Fletcher had given the hint to Messrs. Isaacs and Moss to be handy in

case they were wanted; and those two worthies were ensconced in the bar-parlour, imbibing their favourite beverage, gin.

'Come up to my room,' said Fletcher to the jockey: 'we shall be able to talk without being heard there.'

Wells was agreeable, and the pair having entered the room, Fletcher carefully locked the door.

'Means business,' thought Wells. 'Matters are evidently getting serious with him.'

The conversation was commonplace for some time, as Fletcher hardly knew how to broach the subject he wished to get at. At last he said:

'So you are determined to ride Caloola for Kingdon's push, are you?'

'Yes,' said Wells.

'Can he win?' asked Fletcher.

'They think he can, but I'm not so sure about it. The horse, in my opinion, has never got over the fright he got, and goes a bit lame at times even now. Storey made a wonderful cure of the horse, though.'

'Did he?' said Fletcher. 'I wonder who could have done the trick. It was cleverly managed, whoever did it.'

'That's a mystery,' said Wells. 'I may as well tell you some of the stable fancy you know more about it than most people.'

'Oh, they do? Thank 'em for nothing. I'm not in the habit of "nobbling" horses. I've better fish than that to fry any day. Not much occasion to "hocus" a horse when I have a pal like you; eh, Wells?' and Fletcher laughed a kind of sardonic laugh. He looked at Wells, and the jockey smiled.

'We've been friends for some time now, "Spider," and I hope we shall remain so,' said Wells.

'I had an idea you put me away over the Derby at Randwick,' said Fletcher.

'How could I? Caloola lost, and I told you he would. What more could you want?'

'I fancied you tried to win by the way you rode him, and that it was not your fault he lost,' said Fletcher.

'Never tried a yard on him,' said Wells. 'I'd never go back on you like that, Fletcher.'

'I want you to do me a great favour, the greatest I ever asked you in my life,' said Fletcher. 'I may as well tell you that this is my final *coup*. If it comes off, I am made for life; if it does not, I am ruined. You can make the winning a certainty for me,' he said earnestly.

'How the deuce can I do it?' said Wells.

'Listen for one moment. I have laid a fortune against Caloola and am backing Corisande. I know the latter is regarded as a certainty, but, fit and well, I believe Caloola can beat him.'

Wells pricked up his ears at this. He had fancied Corisande, and thought he could beat Caloola if anything did.

'If Corisande wins,' continued Fletcher, 'I shall score a great success. Isaacs and Moss are in with me over the laying Caloola, and if you will do what I ask you, Wells, we can all be rich men without any trouble. It only wants a little pluck and nerve, and you used to have plenty of that.'

'What's all this got to do with me?' said Wells.

'I want you to make sure of Caloola. In plain words, Caloola must not win. You ride, and you know what that means. You shall stand in with us, and it will be some thousands of pounds in your pocket.'

'You want me to pull the horse, I presume, "Spider."'

'That's about what it comes to, if you will call things by their proper names,' said Fletcher.

'I'm not going to do that. It's more than I dare do. It would ruin me for ever. I should never get another mount.'

'You would never want another mount if this came off; the stakes are too great,' said Fletcher.

'Can't be done. Besides, I'm not going to throw them all over like that. Marston has behaved like the gentleman he is, and so has Lord Mayfield.'

The mention of the two men he hated acted like a spur on Fletcher. He muttered a smothered oath, and said, 'What do you mention their cursed names for? I hate both of them. I would give all I own to see them both ruined.'

'You'd have a job to ruin Lord Mayfield. He's more

money than he knows what to do with. You should see Ravenswood, the house he has taken at St. Kilda. It's a paradise of a place. I believe it's one of the best houses out there,' said Wells.

'Taken a place at St. Kilda, has he?' said Fletcher. 'Hope he'll enjoy himself with his darling wife. What a nice, chaste woman of fashion she is, to be sure.'

'Drop it,' said Wells. 'She never did you any harm. She was always a dashed sight too good for you.'

'Perhaps she was,' said Fletcher. 'But that was not what I wanted to talk about. Are you willing to strike a bargain?'

'No,' said Wells. He had forgotten Ike's strict injunction to keep cool; and the sneering allusion to Lady Mayfield had made him doggedly obstinate. He was in one of his most untractable moods.

'Then I shall have to find a way to make you,' said Fletcher quietly.

'Make me! I'd like to see you do that,' said Wells.

'Would you? Then you shall. Do you recollect this?' and Fletcher drew a cheque from his pocket and showed it to the jockey.

'What's this?' said Wells.

'You know what it is.'

'Never seen it before.'

'Haven't you? Well, it is a forgery, and you did it. The bank would give a good deal to know where they could lay their hand on the man who forged it.'

Wells felt as if he could strike Fletcher dead. In a moment of madness he had forged Fletcher's name. The bank cashed the cheque, and Fletcher repudiated it and declared it a forgery. A minute examination proved it to be so. He got possession of the cheque, and had kept it. The bank he indemnified from all loss over the transaction, and they allowed him to have his own way. He taxed Wells with it, and the jockey, at the time being hard up, begged to be let off. Fletcher promised to say nothing about it, but he held the cheque as a kind of 'force pump' to draw Wells, as he called it.

'What will you give me that cheque for?' said Wells.

'If Caloola loses the Cup you shall have this cheque,

and a big one besides. We don't care so much about the Derby; it is the Cup we want to win with Corisande.'

'Does Corisande belong to you?' said Wells.

'No; he belongs to a friend of mine, though.'

Wells thought for a few moments. He must get that cheque somehow.

'What security am I to have that you will fulfil your promise?' said Wells.

'Security? What do you want? Don't I tell you I'll give you the cheque after the race?' said Fletcher.

'That won't do for me,' said Wells.

'Can't you trust me?' asked Fletcher.

'No,' said Wells. 'I must have that cheque before the race, and I will trust you for the money afterwards.'

'I can't trust you,' said Fletcher. 'I know you cannot play me false while I have this to hang over your head.'

'Let's compromise, then; put that cheque in an envelope and seal it up. Then give it to the landlord of the house to keep till after the Melbourne Cup. If Caloola wins, you get the cheque back; if he loses I get it.'

'That sounds better,' said Fletcher. 'Grogan will keep the cheque all right; he's a friend of mine. Can you trust him?'

'Yes, I'll risk it,' said Wells. He knew Grogan, the landlord, and fancied he could do more with him than Fletcher.

Grogan was called into the room, and the cheque placed in an envelope, duly sealed, and consigned to his care. The instructions were if Caloola won the Cup, Fletcher was to have the note; if he lost, it was to be handed to Wells. Grogan thought the arrangement peculiar, but he said very little about it. Messrs. Isaacs and Moss now came in, having been sent for by Fletcher.

He introduced Wells to the worthy pair, and they were effusively polite.

'It's all settled,' said Fletcher: 'Caloola cannot win; can he, Wells?'

'No; I don't think he's a ghost of a show,' said Wells, with a knowing look.

'That's good' said Moss, as he rubbed his hands. 'And what does our dear friend Wells get out of the little transaction?'

'We must arrange that,' said Fletcher. 'I can't stand all the brunt.'

'Will a little on account be any good?' said Moss.

'Yes, it will come in handy to back Corisande with,' said Wells.

'Ha, ha!' laughed the trio. 'Good joke, very,' said Moss.

'Will a hundred do you now, Wells?' said Fletcher.

'Yes. It's not much, but it will do to bind the bargain,' said Wells.

A cheque was drawn out by Moss for the century, and he handed it to Wells.

'That goes on Caloola,' thought the jockey; but aloud he said, 'I can back Corisande to win a fair stake with that.'

'Then all's settled,' said Fletcher. 'You'll not let Caloola win if you can help it?'

'He hasn't a hundred-to-one chance with this,' said Wells, as he stroked his arm.

'Pretty strong in the arm are you?' laughed Moss.

'Very,' said Wells.

They all went downstairs together, and had a bottle of sparkling.

'Just to drink Caloola's health,' Moss said aloud for the benefit of the company present.

That night Messrs. Isaacs and Moss laid Caloola heavily, and several other bookmakers followed their example. Fletcher was jubilant, and he felt sure the race was as good as lost, and that Marston, Mayfield, and Kingdon were hit heavily.

He would not have been so easy in his mind had he heard a private conversation Wells had with Grogan, the landlord of the Silver Flagon, when Fletcher was absent from the house.

'It's all right, Mr. Wells,' said the landlord in his most amiable tones. 'Thank you for the straight-tip. I'll back Caloola, and you shall have that letter, win or lose, for I know you'll go straight. What a scoundrel that Fletcher is, and the men who are in with him are just as bad. I couldn't have believed it. I'd better keep the letter, because Fletcher may ask for it before he goes to the races, just to see that all's right.'

'Yes, you'd better keep it,' said Wells. 'But don't forget I'm to have it after the race. I'm sure to want it badly, because Caloola will win.'

'Fletcher shan't get it, you may bet on that,' said Grogan; 'but you must get here before him after the races if possible. I'll make some excuse for giving it to you. Say I thought you were to have it if the horse won. My eye! won't he be just mad. He'll be fit to smash the bar up.'

Wells felt on good terms with himself. He had played Fletcher a nice trick, and he had received £100, which his conscience did not blame him at all for taking.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE EVE OF BATTLE.

It is the night before the Derby, and Melbourne is alive with a mass of humanity. The people seem to have suddenly gone racing mad. They talk about the coming event to the exclusion of all other matters. Business cares are for the time laid aside. The all-absorbing topic of conversation is what will win the Derby and Cup. Amongst the thousands of people moving slowly up and down Bourke Street, ninety-nine out of every hundred have their 'bit on.' It is an orderly crowd. Very little pushing or jostling. All classes of men can be seen here, and from all parts of the colonies. Nowhere in the world can you find a people so utterly devoted to the turf, as the crowd in Melbourne on the eve of the Derby. They think of nothing but horses. They know the names of all the cracks, and are as familiar with the jockey's cognomens as they are with the alphabet. Most of them pretend to have an intimate acquaintance with the trainers, and to be on terms of friendship with the riders. The probabilities are, they could not point out any of the men they profess to know so well. It seems big to talk like this, and it gives an air of authority on matters sporting. There are men who know certain trainers and jockeys casually, and Bodon, the whilom journalist, was such a one. The eve of the Derby was of the utmost importance to Bodon. He had invested Smirk's donation

on Caloola for the double, and the result would either make him or break him, as he tersely put it. Bodon hovered about the door of the Victoria Club until he became quite a nuisance. He pestered familiar bookmakers with the query as to how the market was going upstairs. He was decidedly restless. He dived into Barney Allen's to watch the betting, and he bothered Saqui's life out over the purchase of a threepenny smoke.

'Backed Caloola, have you?' said one of the fraternity he buttonholed. 'He hasn't a ghost of a chance.'

'Hasn't he?' wrathfully said Bodon. 'Well, I know better.'

'Then what the deuce did you ask me for?' was the very natural reply.

Bodon was uneasy in his mind. He could see by the odds being laid that the price against Caloola was extending. Perfection was a red-hot first favourite, and Captain Cook and Rob Roy were well backed. Caloola fluctuated a good deal, but his fair price was about five to one. It was, however, for the Cup that the greatest desire was manifested to lay against him. Had Bodon been privileged to go into the room, which he was not, he would have been somewhat surprised. Messrs Isaacs and Moss had made a deliberate set at Caloola the moment they entered the room. They were always ready to lay the double, and for the Cup straight out they stood to lose thousands against the horse. Other members of the ring, seeing them so confident, commenced to lay the horse heavily, and the consequence was Caloola gradually receded in the betting.

Kingdon was present, and he could not understand it. Had Wells been got at? That was the point troubling him. Be it said to the man's credit he was far more anxious for the horse to win for his daughter's sake than for any pecuniary gain he might make out of it. Kingdon was a far different man to men of the Isaacs and Moss stamp. He would have scorned the idea of 'getting at a jockey.' His dealings were fair and above-board. He made use of any information he obtained in a legitimate manner. When he saw Messrs. Isaacs and Moss anxious to lay large sums against the horse he acknowledged it as an ominous sign. He knew these men were intimately

associated with Fletcher, and were no doubt inspired from that quarter. Kingdon was one of the most popular men in the room, and it was also known he belonged to the Caloola party. When, therefore, he let the odds expand against the horse without making a move, it looked as though he had no more money to invest on Caloola.

At last Isaacs, emboldened by the silence of Kingdon, offered in an ostentatious manner to lay five thousand to fifty the two Caloola. This was more than Kingdon could stand, and he took the bet.

'Will you double it, Kingdon?' said Isaacs.

'No thanks. That's plenty at present,' he replied.

'Double it, eh,' thought Kingdon. 'Hang it, the fellow bets as if he had the horse as safe as a bank. Can't make it out. Where the deuce is Wells?'

Wells had not shown up at the club, but Kingdon had no doubt he would do so in the course of the evening. About ten o'clock the jockey entered the room. He looked somewhat flushed, and Kingdon fancied he had been having a glass too much. He was not far out in his calculations. Wells had a penchant for champagne, and he had imbibed rather freely on the strength of the £100 he had received from Isaacs, and which he meant to invest on Caloola.

Kingdon at once took him on one side, and they had an earnest conversation. Wells briefly explained how he had hoaxed Fletcher, and asked Kingdon to invest a hundred on Caloola for the double for him.

'I got five thousand to fifty a short time ago from Isaacs,' said Kingdon. 'You can have half that if you like.'

Wells accepted it, and then Kingdon left him and went across the room. He laid out the remaining seventy-five pounds for Wells, and the jockey therefore stood to win a large sum.

A far different scene from this turmoil and bustle was that at Ravenswood, St. Kilda, where a pleasant family party was gathered at Lord Mayfield's house, in order to be ready for the drive to the course on the morrow. It was a magnificent night—a cool breeze blowing from the sea, and the soft light of the moon shedding a halo of softened glow over the scene. The French windows were wide open, and the guests were lounging on the spacious

veranda beneath the climbing honeysuckle and winding rose-trees, or else reclining in the numerous easy-chairs and settees within the rooms. Lady Mayfield was looking well. She seemed perfectly happy, and yet at times forebodings of evil crossed her mind. Lord Mayfield was most attentive to her, and it was evident he was a captive to her charms. Marston and Edith Kingdon had found a quiet lovers'-nook at one end of the veranda, and were discussing the chances of the races. So much depended upon the victory of Caloola. Edith Kingdon felt depressed. She wished the time of suspense had passed. She longed to know either the best or the worst. Marston tried to cheer her, but he too felt gloomy, and occasionally inclined to be despondent. A note from Kingdon informing him of the uncertain position of Caloola in the betting had not made him comfortable. He could not afford to risk any more. The horse must take its chance. Wells he felt certain of.

'You look quite tired out, Edith,' he said after a spell of silence.

'I am anxious, Jack,' she said. 'To-morrow will decide our fate, or, at least, it will materially change the present state of uncertainty.'

'There's no cause for alarm, Edith. Ike says the horse is as fit as he can make him, and he is confident of victory. He's an honest fellow, Edith. He has been a true friend to me ever since I was a tiny lad riding on his knee.'

'Oh, Jack, it is the eve of our fate. To-morrow will decide the issue of our lives. If Caloola loses the Derby I shall be in despair.'

'Don't look at it like that, Edith. If he loses the Derby we may go for a recovery in the Cup. But, as I said before, Ike is confident he will win the double,' said Jack.

'Let us hope for the best. Why won't you trust me, Jack? Tell me the history of your life. Let me dispel that dark cloud which I see still hovers over you,' said Edith earnestly.

'I cannot, Edith. It is a pitiful tale. I am a deeply injured man. The past I have nearly forgotten. Do not recall it to my memory now; it might sadden our enjoyment to-morrow.'

'Never, Jack. I should like to know all before the events upon which so much depends are decided. Trust me, Jack. I would not ask you if I did not know it was for the best.'

'It is a long story, Edith, but if you will hear it I cannot deny you. You have a right to know it, and you shall.'

And then, in the stillness of the moonlight night, Jack Marston told his tale of blighted love and hopes to his affianced wife. He confessed how he had loved the daughter of the proud old St. Clair, and told of the preparations for the wedding. Then came the tale of a brother's treachery. How one night—such a night as this—he went as usual to meet his love. It was near the eve of their marriage. He walked with a light heart to see her, thinking that on the following day she would be his. And what did he find? He arrived just in time to see her emerge from her father's house on the arm of his brother, Captain Drayton. He could not believe his eyes. He stood as one struck dumb, and remained rooted to the spot. He saw the girl he loved, the girl that was to be his wife, assisted into his brother's carriage. He saw him mount the seat, and then he began to realize the situation. He had been duped, fooled. The girl he loved, the brother he trusted, had played him false. Rage took possession of him. He rushed out and caught the horse's head as it passed the park gates. His eyes met his brother's in deadly hatred. He never looked on the woman that had so shamefully used him. "Perjured liar!" he hissed between his clenched teeth. Then he saw the flash of the cold steel barrel of a pistol, a shot, and he fell bleeding to the ground. The last he remembered was a wild unearthly shriek, then the rattle of wheels, and then—well, he lost consciousness. When he recovered he found Ike Thurton bending over him and pouring brandy down his throat. "Don't say a word, Master Jack; I've seen all," said he. For weeks he lingered hidden away in a cottage remote from his father's house. Ike tended him like a mother. The papers teemed with the sensational elopement of John Drayton and Miss St. Clair. He declined to go to his home again. Bad as his brother was, he would shield him for his father's sake. He felt it would have

killed the Squire had he known what had really happened. He got strong and well, but was strangely altered. With the money he had he sailed for Australia under the name of John Marston.

'Over the result of that fatal night, as regards the unhappy girl, I would rather draw a veil, Edith,' he said. 'I have kept my secret, and my father has been spared the pain. Perhaps some day my brother may repent and tell him all. When he does I can return to my father's house. The Squire must hear the confession from his own lips. I will never tell him of that terrible night.'

'My poor Jack!' said Edith, as he kissed her tenderly.

'And you love me so much, Edith?'

'Better than my life,' she said. 'I am so glad you have told me, Jack. What misery you must have gone through. What became of—of——'

'She is dead, and I trust at peace,' said Marston solemnly.

'You must go home to your father and mother, Jack,' she said. 'How glad the Squire will be to see you again.'

'Yes, poor, dear dad; Ike said it nearly broke his heart. But, thank Heaven! he does not believe me guilty of wronging that loving girl.'

'No one who knows you could, Jack,' Edith said gently.

Marston pressed her hand, and said, 'It is worth all to have won a love like yours, Edith. My first dream was mere infatuation; this is genuine, honest love.'

'We must share our fortunes, Jack. If Caloola does not win I have enough for both,' she said.

'I cannot accept that, Edith. I must win a home for you myself. I should never feel happy if I accepted such a sacrifice from you. No, you must not throw yourself away upon a penniless scamp like myself!'

'That is unkind, Jack. Love is more than wealth. I am not ambitious. I could live with you anywhere,' she said.

'I know it, Edith,' he replied; 'and therefore all the more reason why I should not accept any such sacrifice.'

'Do you know, I fancy your telling me that painful story of the past will bring us good luck. The confidence you have reposed in me has made me feel more convinced of success. It is a good augury for to-morrow, Jack.'

'I trust it may prove so, Edith. We had better join the others now.'

They strolled along the veranda and met Lord and Lady Mayfield, who were as affectionate as a couple of lovers. The ladies soon retired for the night, and Mayfield and Marston over a cigar discussed the chances of the morrow.

'It's a case of sink or swim with me, Mayfield. I'm heavily in,' said Jack.

'Don't let that worry you, my dear fellow. Remember you have always one friend you can rely upon, Marston. I've enough and to spare for the pair of us.'

'You're too generous,' said Marston. 'I could not accept a shilling. I can pay if I lose, and that is about all.'

'Do you recollect the first time we met?' said Lord Mayfield.

'Very well,' laughed Jack.

'By gad, old fellow, you frightened me, you looked so deuced ferocious! You took me down a peg, Jack, and I deserved it. What a cad you must have thought me!'

'I did not have the same opinion then I have of you now,' candidly said Jack. 'You have altered. Blood will tell, you know, and there's some of the good British blue blood in you, Mayfield.'

'Thanks, old fellow,' said Lord Mayfield, as he grasped his hand. 'How did you take it when you heard I had gone off with Daisy?'

'Couldn't make it out at first,' said Jack. 'She loves you, Mayfield, and she's a splendid woman.'

'Yes; she won't disgrace me at home,' said Mayfield.

'When do you intend to go to England?' said Marston.

'Soon after the races—about January or February. I should like to be home for the next Derby.'

'And so should I,' said Jack. 'By Jove! we'll go if Caloola wins the double.'

'So we will,' said Lord Mayfield, and they meant it. As they strolled into the house and went to their respective rooms, they little thought of the scenes that would be enacted within a brief space of time. Lady Mayfield, as she softly slept with the tranquillity of a child, looked the picture of innocent happiness. Lord Mayfield gazed at her fondly, and gently kissed the fair white hand on the coverlet.

In after-years he never forgot the memory of that night. He kissed her fervently, and she murmured in her sleep, 'My husband!'

'My love!' he whispered to the unconscious form.

How deep her love and self-sacrifice were for him he learnt all too soon.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DERBY DAY.

A GLORIOUS bright November morning. The sun came out in all its splendour. Rays somewhat hot and dazzling, but tempered with a cool, refreshing breeze. A splendid racing day. A day to gladden the heart of man, and a day to induce the ladies to dress in their best and look their best. A day of good omen. The weather might have been specially manufactured for the occasion. An eventful day, this sunny bright first of November, full of absorbing interest to the various persons in this narrative. So far they have gone along 'with the tide,' and at last it has led them to the supreme moment of their existence. Much depends upon this day. It may bring happiness and sunshine into many hearts, or it may perchance lead them on to despair.

Jack Marston and Lord Mayfield were early astir, and as they strolled in the garden, luxuriant with flowers, refreshing themselves with a morning weed, they discussed the chances of the day.

'Could not be better weather, Marston. I have an idea our luck's in this time. Caloola will win, have no fear. What a terrible facer it will be to Fletcher and his crowd if it should come off! The Derby win will make it hard for them to get out of their difficulties over the Cup, but if the double does come off, why, then, "broker" will be the correct word to apply to some of them,' said Lord Mayfield.

'There's no doubt about that scoundrel Fletcher,' said Marston. 'I hear he has laid madly against the horse, and plunged on Corisande. I shall feel a double satisfaction in winning if I know it will ruin him. And yet, Mayfield, I should not like the man to go to the wall altogether. We must do something for him if he is ruined.'

'Shan't give him a red cent more than I allow him now. I shall pay him his five hundred a year for life, provided he lets us alone. I threatened to stop that once, but I'll relent so far; but he must not get a shilling of the winnings.'

'Very well,' said Marston, 'as you like. The fellow does not deserve anything. I wonder if Smirk will arrest him. He said he had evidence enough to convict him.'

'If Smirk says he'll do so, then depend upon it he will. I like that man, Marston,' said Lord Mayfield.

'He is honest, and discreet. Do you know why he came out here?' said Marston.

'That's what puzzles me, and how you know him too,' he replied.

'I may as well tell you the mystery,' said Jack. 'My name is not Marston. I am John Drayton, son of Squire Drayton, of Drayton Hall, Derbyshire.'

'Good heavens! you don't mean it, Jack! Why, I have heard my father speak of the Squire repeatedly, and I met your sister in London a couple of seasons ago. Charming girl she is; and now I come to think of it, I see the likeness. I couldn't imagine where I had seen a face like yours before. What on earth made you come out here?'

Marston related the story he had told Edith Kingdon, and concluded by saying:

'Smirk was sent out by the Squire to hunt myself and Ike down. He has accomplished his mission, and if Caloola wins we may return home.'

Lord Mayfield was naturally astonished at the tale he heard, but it increased his respect for his friend considerably.

'You must still call me Marston,' laughed Jack.

'That will not be a very difficult matter,' said Lord Mayfield. 'The great difficulty will be to remember you are Jack Drayton, and not Marston at all. I feel as if I had lost one friend and found another.'

'I thought I would tell you,' said Marston. 'It has relieved my mind considerably. I always felt as though I were sailing under false colours.'

Lord Mayfield's turn-out would have done credit to a meet of the four-in-hand club on the Row. He never did things by halves. Four spanking bays were harnessed to a magnificent coach which had been specially built for the

occasion. As it drew up at the main entrance Marston could not help an exclamation of surprise. He knew about the horses, but he had never seen the coach before.

'This is real English Derby style, Mayfield,' he said.

'Reminds one of a merry drive to Epsom, does it not?' was the reply.

The horses were a splendid match, for height, colour, and shape. They were a team the Governor himself would have been proud to possess. Lord Mayfield was not a particularly good whip, and he asked Marston to drive.

'Better drive yourself,' said Jack, 'or people will give me credit for being the happy possessor of such a turn-out.'

'Let them; I'm willing,' said Lord Mayfield.

And so it was agreed Marston should handle the ribbons.

They were a merry party: Lord and Lady Mayfield, Jack Marston, and Edith Kingdon, Hugh Wilson and his wife (Wilson was a millionaire, having made a fortune out of Broken Hills); Sir Benjamin Dobson, Lady Adelina Macpherson, Miss Kate Sorenson, a society actress, and a very charming lady to boot; Laurence Fairfield, an accomplished English singer, out for the benefit of his health, and several well-known figures in Melbourne society. As Marston took the reins it could easily be seen he knew how to handle them. Lady Mayfield was on the box-seat at his side, and Edith Kingdon and Lord Mayfield behind. Lady Mayfield looked simply beautiful. She was at her best, and her husband felt proud of her. Even Marston, absorbed with thoughts of Edith, could not help but think what a splendid woman she was.

It was a day of triumph for Lady Mayfield—a day she had often dreamt of, but never expected to see realized. She had on a pale-blue dress, with flowered silk combined; the full sleeves and front of her dress pale blue, and the back of dark shot silk, with a flowered pattern. On her dainty head she had the nattiest of blue bonnets to match her dress. She wore very little jewellery, with the exception of a magnificent diamond at her slender throat. Edith Kingdon had a beautiful buttercup silk, with gold lacing on the puffed sleeves, and Lord Mayfield thought he had never seen two ladies carry their costumes with more grace. And yet one was a bookmaker's daughter, and the other was a

woman with a past that must be buried in oblivion. Both were ladies in every sense of the word now.

A crack of the whip, a blow of the horn, a 'Steady, boy' from Marston, and the four bays dashed out of the gate and whirled round into the road at a brisk trot. They stepped along like well-bred horses should do, and gave Marston very little trouble. He guided them through the Melbourne streets with little difficulty, and they bowled along merrily to Flemington. The road was thronged with a variety of vehicles, good, bad and indifferent. The occupants had one common distinction and one common object in view, viz., to reach the course and back their fancies.

Down the members' drive dashed the coach, Marston having his team well in hand, and the beauty of the turn-out attracted universal attention.

Flemington is reached, the scene of many a desperate struggle, many a heavy win and loss.

Flemington is one of the finest racecourses in the world. The management is perfect. The ease and comfort of visitors are attended to in the most lavish manner. The lawn at Flemington may well bear comparison with Goodwood and Ascot. It is beautifully kept, and on this sunny November morning it looks at its best. The flower-beds are resplendent with a mass of dazzling colour. The fountain sheds its cool spray around, the water dancing in the sunlight like myriads of diamonds. The costumes of the ladies are of the richest. All the wealth and beauty of Melbourne is assembled on the lawn at Flemington to-day. There are beautiful women in Australia, and they can be seen at their best on the lawn at Flemington. There is little crushing and crowding. The grand stand may be packed, but there is ample room to see on the sloping lawn. The Maribyrnong stand is empty, but Tattersall's stand, before each race, is filled to overflowing.

Then the Hill. Who can ever forget the Hill at Flemington that has seen it on Cup Day? To-day it is not so crowded, but there are some thousands of people present. There is no better place for the masses to see a race than the Hill at Flemington. Down on the flat are assembled the usual motley group of race-goers. No charge is made there, and yet the racing can be seen from all parts of the

extensive space at the disposal of the people. There is a vast difference between the crowd at the Victorian Derby and the English Derby. The former is a well-behaved, sober meeting; the latter is a pandemonium of all that is disgusting and low. And yet the Victorians enjoy their Derby at Flemington quite as much as the Cockneys at Epsom. The first race is over, and all the horses are being saddled up for the Stakes, and the favourite is Corisande, the horse Ike Thurton fears may give Caloola trouble. He's a splendid animal. With only 6 st. 12 lb. in the Melbourne Cup, if he can win the stakes at weight for age he must be a moral. There are several good horses in the race. Amongst others Kingdon's Firefly, upon which Wells has the mount. The Hon. James White is running his great horse Monarch, the hero of many a gallant victory. The Caulfield Cup winner and two three-year-olds make up the field. The race needs but little description. It was a tight finish from the distance, but Hales landed Monarch home a length in front of Firefly, with Corisande close up third.

The great race the favourite ran at level weights with Monarch and Firefly, caused a rush on him for the Cup, and the bookies were loath to lay him, but in some places big wagers at three to one were taken.

'Corisande will be hard to beat in the Cup with 6 st. 12 lb., Ike,' said Marston.

'He should win it with that weight,' said Ike; 'but I have some doubt about him getting the two miles, and so have his party.'

Wells was not so sanguine of Caloola pulling off the double, after the way Corisande had run, and he said the horse ran game enough.

Luncheon was over, and the time for saddling up the Derby candidates had arrived.

Marston, as he went to look after Caloola with Lord Mayfield, said to Edith, 'Keep your spirits up, darling; I feel sure we shall win—to-day, at all events. And, remember, you must put the blue ribbon round his neck if he does.'

'But Lady —— will do that,' said Edith, mentioning the name of the Governor's wife.

'She's not here,' said Jack. 'Indisposed. I'm sorry for her ladyship; but I'm glad for your sake, Edith.'

'Oh, I do hope you'll win, Jack! Come back before the race,' she said.

Lady Mayfield was quite excited, and as Lord Mayfield went after Marston, she said:

'Do put me something on for myself; I am so anxious to win on Caloola.'

'All right, dearest. I'll put you fifty on straight out.'

'You dear, good boy! I'll be additionally kind in the future,' she said archly.

In the paddock there was a crowd of people examining the cracks for the big race of the day. Perfection was the favourite, and as usual with the Hon. James White's candidate, the horse was literally mobbed by his admirers. Captain Cook, Rob Roy, and Maori were there to fight the Randwick battle over again. Dandy Dick, Melissa and Shooting Star were also amongst the probables, and Caloola was there looking in perfect condition. He, too, had a large crowd of people around him, but curiosity to see the sensational horse was the chief attraction. Somehow or other the general body of backers fought shy of Caloola. The public do not like a horse that has been under a cloud.

No fault could be found with Caloola. As Ike tightened the girths, and Wells stood by looking particularly confident, Marston and Lord Mayfield felt their spirits revive considerably.

'He looks good enough, Ike,' said Jack.

'He's the best three-year-old, bar the old Squire's Mohican, I ever put eyes on. He'll win to-day, Mr. Marston, but I am afraid of his foot. He might split his hoof. It seems a bit inclined that way. Even if he did so, I don't despair of landing the Cup.'

'If he comes in lame after the race there will be a dead set against him for the Cup,' said Marston.

'Dead set or no dead set he'll about win. I wouldn't lay any more out for the double, though,' said Ike.

'You'd better hedge some of your sweep money, Ike,' said Jack.

'Not a penny. I'll stand or fall by him. He's good enough.'

The bell rang 'Go to the post,' and Wells was flung into the saddle. Caloola seemed quite calm.

'Curious,' said Ike; 'he'll never rest in his box without that blessed goat. When once he's outside he's all right.'

Caloola walked quietly across the paddock. All at once he gave a bound which scattered the crowd in all directions, and would have thrown a less experienced man than Wells out of the saddle.

'By Jove, that's curious!' said Lord Mayfield. 'Did you see that, Marston?'

'See what? I saw Caloola spring, but that's one of his old games.'

'I don't mean that. Fletcher passed close in front of the horse when he did it. Curious, is it not? Looks as though Caloola knew the fellow had done him a mischief.'

'It was strange,' said Marston—'merely a coincidence.'

'I'm not so sure of that. These fine-bred horses are very sensitive,' said Lord Mayfield.

'We must go back to the ladies,' said Marston; and they hurried across the paddock. The bookmakers were roaring themselves hoarse. 'Even money Perfection, 3 to 1 Captain Cook, 4 to 1 Melissa, 6 to 1 Caloola.' These were the odds that they heard.

'Wait a second, Marston. I promised Daisy I would put £50 on your horse for her.'

He went across to a well-known Sydney bookmaker and booked the bet. Marston followed, and took 600 to 100 about his horse. He passed close by Tom Bates, the man who gave Ike Thurton the sovereign when he first landed, and the bookmaker said to him:

'I've backed your horse, Mr. Marston.'

'Oh, have you?' said Jack. 'I hope you'll win.'

'Your trainer told me. By Jove! that was the best sov. I ever invested.'

Marston had almost forgotten the incident, but this expression recalled it, and he smiled at the enthusiastic layer of odds.

'Come along,' said Lord Mayfield, and they hurried across the lawn to the stand, where their party had kept their seats.

'What a long time you have been!' chorussed the ladies.

'We are waiting for you to complete the sweep: give me a pound each, please,' said Lady Mayfield.

The sovereigns were handed to her, and the sweep drawn. Edith Kingdon had drawn Caloola, and Marston regarded this as another good omen, as did also Lord Mayfield.

The preliminary canter was now taking place. Perfection led off, with Hales riding in his best style. Then came Melissa and Captain Cook together, followed by Shooting Star, Dandy Dick, and Maori. Caloola came striding down the straight last, the brilliant jacket of Marston flashing in the sunlight. There was a murmur of admiration at the horse's long, low, sweeping, greyhound-like stride. Wells had him in hand, but he pulled like a lion.

'Splendid action!' 'Fittest horse out!' 'Wish I'd backed him!' 'Don't like these sensational beggars,' 'He's a devil of a temper, I'm told.' These were the kind of remarks bandied about. Ike Thurton watched the horses closely as they went past him in the straight, and when Caloola moved so freely he looked well satisfied and gave a quiet chuckle as he thought how the horse would astonish them. He had told Wells not to make too much use of him for the first mile, but to trust to the horse's great turn of speed. Ike was a little frightened of that leg yet. The starter has got them marshalled at the post, and in another moment they will be off.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RACE.

SHORTLY after the horses reached the post two persons could have been noticed on the lawn looking intently at the Mayfield party. One of them was Smirk, the other Reginald Hatherstone. Smirk had kept his promise, and pointed out Lady Mayfield to Hatherstone. There could be no doubt about the recognition, for Hatherstone's sudden start proved that her ladyship was the woman he had once loved, and loved still. There was little time for conversation, but Smirk heard him mutter, 'How beautiful she looks, and happy! Perhaps it was all for the best. I shall not be one to disturb the even tenor of her life. She has prob-

ably forgotten me, and it is better that it should be so.' Very little interest had Reginald Hatherstone in the coming race for the Derby.

Smirk was about to enter into a conversation with him on the subject, when there came the well-known cry of, 'They're off!'

True enough. After a couple of false starts, Mr. Watson had lowered the flag to an excellent despatch, the horses moving away almost in line. The first to show prominently was Melissa, who cut out the running at a warm pace, and led the field merrily along the back of the course. Shooting Star came next, and then Captain Cook, Dandy Dick, with Perfection and Caloola in the rear. Hales was watching his opponent keenly, and Wells had a wary eye on the crack jockey. Half a mile passed with very little change, except that the favourite and Caloola closed a little on the leaders.

Glasses were levelled at the horses as they swept round the far turn, and Lord Mayfield said:

'It takes Wells all his time to hold Caloola, Marston. By Jove! he looks as though he could gallop over them. I hope he'll last the distance, but he's fighting for his head now.'

'Wells knows how to ride him. He'll hold him well in hand, never fear,' said Jack.

There were more interested spectators than the Mayfield party watching the race.

Smirk had a peculiar interest in it, and the scarlet jacket being distinguishable in the rear, he thought it was all up with Marston's horse, and he vowed additional vengeance on Fletcher's head.

Fletcher and his confederates were watching the race from Tattersall's stand, and it made the 'Spider' shudder as he saw how Caloola tore after the leaders. He felt that at any moment the son of Chester could have galloped past them. However, he consoled himself by the thought that he had squared Wells for the Cup, so, after all, the Derby did not matter very much.

On came the horses, and the home turn was reached. Round the bend came Melissa, with a clear lead of a length. Then followed Captain Cook and Rob Roy, with

Perfection and Caloola, the latter on the rails, and Wells watching for a chance to slip through.

Down the straight they came.

The glasses trembled in Edith Kingdon's hands as she glanced at the approaching horses. The brilliant scarlet jacket was flashing in the sunlight, and Wells was sitting on the horse as still as a mouse. Her heart beat fast, for she fancied she saw Caloola falter in his stride. She could hardly forbear an exclamation of alarm.

'Oh, Jack, what's the matter with the horse?'

Jack Marston could not answer. He, too, had seen what appeared to be a slight stumble on the part of Caloola, and Wells had moved in the saddle.

'He's all right yet, Edith. Don't be alarmed,' he said, although he felt anything but safe. 'I'm afraid his foot's giving way,' he whispered to Lord Mayfield.

'If it is, Wells has got him right again. Look at him now. Heavens, Jack, what a horse he is!' said Lord Mayfield.

As they approach the distance Hales sends Perfection along, and he gradually overhauls the leaders. Still Wells hugs the rails with Caloola, and seems as though he would be blocked.

'Why on earth doesn't he get through,' said Lord Mayfield angrily. 'He had an opening then.'

'Not safe, though,' said Marston, who was becoming excited. 'He's riding a splendid race. Look, look!' he fairly shouted. 'Melissa's beaten and fallen back. By Jove! that was what he was waiting for, he's a great judge of pace.'

It was true; Melissa faltered in her stride, and, swerving to the right, gave Wells his opportunity. Quick as a flash he sent Caloola through the narrow opening. It was a magnificent piece of horsemanship, and daring also. This feat had gained Caloola at least two lengths, and he was now galloping well within reach of the favourite.

'Perfection wins! Bravo, Hales!' A well-known cry, the latter, at Flemington. The blue and white jacket was in the van, and at the half-distance led by nearly a length. Wells had not moved on Caloola yet, but Hales began to get restless on Perfection. He glanced at Caloola, and saw the horse seemed full of running.

Up goes Hales' right arm, and down comes the whip with a thud. Perfection answered to the call, but in the next few strides he faltered.

'The favourite's beat!' roared the crowd.

A moment, a mere recoil, and then came a deafening shout that made Marston's blood tingle and Edith Kingdon turn pale with suppressed emotion.

It was a shout that struck terror into the hearts of Fletcher and his mates. It was a shout that made some score of bookmakers think of settling day. It was a shout that made the inexcitable Smirk stand on tiptoe to catch a glimpse of the horses. It was a shout that fairly brought the tears to honest Ike Thurton's eyes.

'Caloola wins! Caloola wins!'

What a magnificent thunder of human voices!

Not a man of the crowd begrudged that great horse a victory.

Frantic with excitement which he could restrain no longer, Marston waved his hat. The effect was magical. Lord Mayfield caught the infection, and it was communicated, as it seemed, to the occupants of the stand. Handkerchiefs waved, and fair hands were clapped with excitement.

Wells on Caloola, sitting like a statue, shot past the favourite. The scarlet jacket danced in front, and the blue and white was left behind.

Stride upon stride did the splendid animal gain upon the rest of the field. Wells took a cautious glance around, and, seeing he had his horses beaten, smiled a joyous smile.

Another moment and the scarlet jacket flashed past the judge's box a clear two lengths in front of Perfection, with Captain Cook close up third.

And now the popularity of the owner could be gauged.

Cheer after cheer rent the air. Edith Kingdon was almost overcome with the excitement, but quickly revived when the critical moment had passed.

'The greatest tussle is to come yet, Edith,' said Marston; 'but I have no fear now, after the manner in which the horse won.'

'I wish it was all over, Jack,' she said. 'Another race like that will be too much for me.'

Congratulations flowed in on all sides, as Marston walked

down the lawn to take a look at his horse. Lord Mayfield had remained behind to take Edith Kingdon and Lady Mayfield across to the course to place the blue ribbon on the winner.

'All right,' was signalled, and again there was a cheer.

Ike Thurton looked as though he had won a kingdom. He eyed the horse proudly as Marston led him up the course.

Caloola looked around with flashing eyes, and seemed inclined to be restless. He did not seem to have taken much harm during the race, although there was just the slightest sign of a limp. He looked a noble animal divested of the saddle, and Marston might well feel proud of the reception accorded him. He raised his hat in response to the cheers of the crowd, and his handsome face beamed with exultation. It was a proud moment for him. It was the day he had long looked forward to.

And Kingdon, how did he feel? He was overwhelmed with good wishes, and he felt exceedingly comfortable now they had got a 'leg in.'

But the proudest moment of Kingdon's life was when he saw his daughter, accompanied by Lord and Lady Mayfield and a select party, standing around Caloola. He felt that if his occupation was not very desirable, and he might be looked on askance by some people, he had ample recompense in the honour done his daughter.

'She's fit to mix with the best of them,' he thought proudly—'my Edith. How splendid she looks! This day was worth living for.'

Caloola, when he saw Edith Kingdon, whinnied gently, and rubbed his nose against her soft white hand. As she tremblingly placed the blue ribbon around his neck there was another cheer from the crowd. She patted Caloola's neck, and he seemed proud of the attention shown him. Lady Mayfield placed her dainty hand upon him, and said:

'You have won more than you imagine, you fine creature. You must win the Cup, and then you will be the best horse in the world—won't he, Edith?'

'He will, indeed,' said Edith Kingdon, as she looked at him fondly.

The ceremony of investing Caloola with the ribbon

having been performed, Marston gave the horse in charge of Ike, who led him away. As he walked down the course there was an ominous murmur.

'He's lame,' was whispered from ear to ear.

It was indeed an alarming whisper, and it spread like wildfire.

'Caloola's broken down!'

One of the first to hear it in the ring was Fletcher, and it was such good news he could hardly believe it. He rushed away to tell his confederates, Isaacs and Moss, and they quaffed a bottle of sparkling over it with high glee.

'What did I tell you?' said Fletcher. 'With the horse lame and the jockey right, we've as good as got the money in our pockets.'

Ike Thurton glanced anxiously at Caloola as he limped down the course, and the slowness with which he moved caused a chill to pass over Marston's heart. The cup of happiness seemed to be snatched away almost as soon as it had touched his lips. Edith Kingdon saw it, and her fears for the worst were renewed. Lord Mayfield and Daisy were not quite so downcast.

'I've seen lame horses win big races, Mr. Marston,' said Lady Mayfield.

'So have I,' said his lordship. 'It may not be so bad, after all. We'll go and see Ike.'

'I don't like the look of it a bit,' said Marston, as he strolled across the ring towards the paddock.

'Look at that brute,' said Lord Mayfield, as he pointed to Fletcher, who was smiling at them triumphantly. 'He's delighted, I have no doubt, at the success of his diabolical plans.'

'Come away,' said Marston, with suppressed anger. 'If I go near him I cannot keep my hands off him. I should thrash him in the ring, and I don't want to have a scene here.'

Ike was carefully examining the horse when they reached the stable, and a crowd of people were eagerly scanning the Derby winner.

'He's split his hoof,' said Ike; 'but I fancy it can be patched up for the Cup. Storey must have a look at it. I'll take him home now.'

'Yes, do, Ike; that will be the best plan. He'll do better away from the course. Remember what we have at stake, Ike. We must win the Cup, if possible. Think what depends upon it, Ike,' said Marston.

'Master Jack,' whispered the honest fellow, 'I'll do my level best. I think he can be got right, although there is always the chance of a breakdown in the race. I've seen horses in a worse state than Caloola win, and with more weight than he will have to carry. A little care will get him round. He wants no more gallops, and we can have the hoof fixed up all right. Tell Miss Kingdon we'll win the double yet,' he said cheerfully.

Although Ike tried to gloss the matter over, he felt anything but confident, and it was with sad misgivings at heart that he led Caloola gently home.

Meanwhile, Marston and Lord Mayfield were putting the best face they could upon the matter, and reassured the ladies that Caloola's lameness was merely temporary and would soon wear off.

The members of the ring, however, thought differently, and the odds against Caloola for the Cup expanded considerably as the day wore on.

The remainder of the races had very little interest for the Mayfield party, although they were pleased to see the Hon. James White secure the Maribyrnong Plate. Shortly before the last race Smirk and Hatherstone passed close by the stand in front of Lady Mayfield. Smirk raised his hat and passed on, Hatherstone doing the same.

Lady Mayfield looked at Hatherstone with a startled expression upon her face. She had not recognised him, he was so changed, but she had a dim recollection that he had been mixed up in scenes in her past life she would not care to recall. Once she had loved the man; but his memory had faded away in the midst of the scenes through which her life had passed. How quickly the loves of our youth are forgotten, although in some hearts they leave a scar which lasts for ever! Lady Mayfield had enjoyed the races, and the excitement of the Derby. She felt depressed, however, now it was over, and had a peculiar feeling she could not account for.

'Spider Fletcher passed in front of the stand, and she

saw him. A shudder passed over her as she looked at him. Fletcher fixed his eyes upon her with a cold, hateful smile playing about his mouth. It was a smile of triumph, and Lady Mayfield felt he must have good cause for it.

'Let us go home,' she said to Lord Mayfield; 'I feel depressed and have a headache. The excitement has been too much for me.'

'You look pale and worried, Daisy,' he said. 'Something must have annoyed you. What is it?'

'I have a strange presentiment of something dreadful happening,' she said. 'What it is I do not know, but it produces a feeling of alarm. It's a mere foolish fancy. Take no notice of it, dear,' she said.

'Daisy, you must get rid of these fears,' he said earnestly. 'There's no cause for them. You are safe with me.'

'But are you safe?' she said, with a quick glance.

'Perfectly,' he laughed. 'If it is on my account you fear danger, put it aside at once.'

'I will try. If Caloola wins the Cup, I am afraid *that man* will do something desperate,' she said.

'He dare not,' said Lord Mayfield.

The drive home was not so lively as might have been expected. The lameness of Caloola had cast a gloom over the party, despite their endeavours to make light of the matter. Marston and Lord Mayfield had an earnest talk that night, and after the subject had been thoroughly discussed, they came to the conclusion that, after all, a win in the Cup was not impossible.

'We shall not be able to hedge,' said Marston. 'We shall have to stand it all.'

'And win because we cannot lose,' laughed Lord Mayfield.

After a few moments' silence, Lord Mayfield said:

'Jack, I want to tell you something particular. Daisy has a presentiment that if Caloola wins the Cup, Fletcher will take his revenge upon myself. She was partly terrified at the races about it, and I saw her shudder as he passed on the lawn. I fancy it would have been better for Smirk to have played his trump card before the Cup, and apprehended him.'

'Leave that to Smirk,' said Marston. 'As to Fletcher

I believe he will be more inclined to revenge himself upon me, because it is my horse that will do him all the mischief if he wins. The man's an arrant coward, and I don't think there is much cause for fear.'

'I'm glad you think so,' said Lord Mayfield. 'I don't like his looks myself.'

'If he causes any annoyance, Smirk will soon settle him. He says he shall have him locked up as soon as possible after the Cup. If we win, however, I think he might let him go, because Caloola's double will certainly break him. Here's one of Ike's lads. What's up now, I wonder?' said Marston as a boy on horseback came cantering up the drive.

'Letter for you, Mr. Marston,' said the lad, respectfully touching his cap.

Marston tore it open eagerly and read aloud:

'Storey has seen Caloola. Says he can patch him up, and that he will stand the Cup race. This being so, we must win. There is no cause for alarm.'

'Bravo!' said Lord Mayfield.

'That has relieved my mind considerably,' said Jack. 'I wish it was all over. There is too much depending upon it for my liking.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

BEFORE THE CUP.

STOREY had certainly seen Caloola, and Ike had most assuredly sent the note Jack Marston received; but the worthy pair were anything but as sanguine as the epistle would lead one to believe. The vet. had made a minute examination, the result of which he communicated to Ike as they sat chatting on the Sunday after the Derby. The Sunday after a great race gives breathing space for a time. There is a peculiar quiet, soothing effect about Sunday. Some people might imagine the ordinary trainer of racehorses cares very little for Sunday. They are mistaken, as most people who know very little about these things generally are. To the trainer Sunday comes as a rest day, and not only that, it is a day upon which very many trainers give

their horses a rest also, and consequently everyone about the establishment has more or less of a holiday. I have known trainers in England who have prayers every morning, at which the apprentices have to attend. I wonder how many people who regularly go to church on Sunday, in the agony of black clothes and a beaver hat, can say the same. There is a trainer at the present time in Australia who is actually a devotee, and will not miss going to church for the world. He's none the worse at his business for it, but all the better. He can train a horse as well as any man, and there is no cant about him. If there is one day more than another I like to have a chat with the trainer on, it is Sunday.

So Ike and Storey discussed the prospects of the forthcoming Cup amidst the calm and quiet of a peaceful Sabbath day. Hardly a sound could be heard. They were away from the hum of the busy city, and the roar of the crowd was a thing of yesterday. How peculiar a racecourse looks after a scene of great excitement! Flemington on the Sunday after the Derby seems quite disconsolate. It is comparatively deserted until Cup Day, when it will teem with its eager thousands again. A philosopher could moralize for hours over such a scene. He could picture the agonies that have been endured there, the fortunes that have been won and lost. He could meditate on the past, he could ruminate on the future. If I were such a man, I could people that deserted course with phantoms, and fill the stands with men and women long since vanished from the scene. I could call to mind the equine heroes that had fought out their battles on this famous track, and the jockeys who rode them to victory. Not being such a man, I will not do it. Patience, reader; I am progressing slowly, but surely.

Storey's opinion of Caloola amounted to this: the horse could be brought to the post in a condition to run, but he would have to be kept for that one gallop, and nursed in the race. He fancied the hoof would give way if the pace was a cracker from the start, and this it was almost sure to be.

'At any rate I'll try my best, Ike. I'll bind the hoof firmly, and he must run in a bar-shoe. You must not give

him another gallop before the race. A mere canter or a good long walk would be better,' he said.

'The horse is thoroughly wound up now,' said Ike. 'I'm not one of those men who think because a horse has two or three days' rest he cannot race. The Derby gallop put the finishing touch upon him, and he won't need any more. Gentle walking exercise will do it. I don't fancy that bar-shoe much. It will go against him.'

'Won't go half as much as running without it,' said Storey. 'What about Wells? will he ride strictly to orders, do you think?'

'I'm certain of it,' said Ike; 'but he's got some curious idea about a dream he's had. Fancies he saw certain colours making the pace, or something of that sort, and is under the impression he must keep alongside them to win.'

'He must ride as he's told, Ike. The race depends upon it. I wish he were here now,' said Storey.

'I fancy he will come before the night's out,' said Ike.

True enough Wells did come, and he got a few direct hints from Storey.

Wells was jockey enough to know that with a horse in Caloola's condition he must nurse him for a final effort. He said very little, but he had made up his mind to ride his own race, for he felt sure he could tell to an ounce what the horse could do.

And so the time passed away until Monday night came, and the scene at the Victoria Rooms was one to be remembered. On Monday morning Caloola was out on the track. His fore-foot was bound up in a most suspicious manner, and he walked slowly about. The horse was not lame, but the universal opinion of those who saw him was that he would crack up in the race. Frequenters of the track don't like to see horses with suspicious-looking bandages on of any description. Bar the curious foot, Caloola was immensely fancied. He had won the Derby like a racehorse, and the big event seemed at his mercy if he was sound. That little 'if,' of what vast importance it is on the racecourse! 'If' he's on the job. 'If' they've got the money on. 'If' he's perfectly sound. 'If' he starts. 'If' he's thoroughly wound up, and so on. The 'ifs' of racing would fill a good-sized volume.

At the Victoria Rooms the majority of the bookmakers would not have Caloola at any price. Corisande was a better favourite than ever, and three to one could be got about the thrown-in six-year-old with difficulty. Messrs. Isaacs and Moss laid everything in the race with freedom bar the favourite, and Caloola was hit at wherever opportunity offered. The field for the Cup promised to number about a score of runners, and nearly every horse in the race was backed. Next to Corisande came Euchre, a real good horse, heavily weighted, but by no means out of it. As the night wore on, first one horse came with a rush and then another, but Caloola gradually dropped back until 100 to 6 was offered without response. Now, this price against the winner of the Derby was in itself an acknowledgment that there was something wrong with the horse. A sinister rumour had got about that the jockey had been squared, and that the horse was not fit to run. Messrs. Isaacs and Moss were not slow to circulate this rumour. With Israelitish cunning, they fancied that after all it would be better to hedge a little of their own money in case of accidents, and, of course, the longer the odds the better for them. They meant to keep Fletcher out of this little transaction. He could bear the brunt if Caloola won. So the wily pair, through a commissioner as wily as themselves, hedged a considerable amount of Caloola money at a fair price. But this did not bring Caloola up in the market, because the money had come from the wrong quarter. When Lord Mayfield and Marston entered the room late in the evening, there was a lull. Both looked confident, and laughed and joked with everyone.

'Will you back your horse, Mr. Marston?' said one well-known leviathan. 'I'll lay you 1000 to 60.'

'You're joking, surely,' said Marston, who was rather surprised at the length of the figure.

'Not a bit of it, sir. Shall I book it?'

'Yes,' said Marston quietly, as he made a note of the bet.

'I'll take that wager too,' said Lord Mayfield, and down went the bet.

Still the odds did not lessen. Marston was exasperated.

'I'll go neck or nothing, Mayfield,' he said. 'I may as well be struck for the lot.'

'Steady, old man,' said Lord Mayfield, who knew the amount of Marston's liabilities.

'Oh, I'll be steady,' said Jack irritably. He was really annoyed at this demonstration against his horse.

At last the acceptance of five thousand pounds at 1000 to 60 steadied the horse a little, and many public backers followed Marston's lead. Caloola advanced, and touched 10 to 1. A tremendous rush on Tarana, another lightly-weighted horse, caused a revolution in the betting. Conscript, Rob Roy, Crosscut, Oberon, Captain Cook and Perfection were all well backed. As the night wore on the betting became more furious.

Lord Mayfield and Marston, as they left the room, still heard the odds of 100 to 7 against Caloola offered. Even seven thousand taken about the horse had not steadied him much, and, considering the ring would be harder hit than they had ever been before if he won the double, they both thought it very strange.

It was a night of vast excitement to many thousands of people. The crowd outside the rooms in Bourke Street was immense, and it was difficult to move about. As Marston and Lord Mayfield came down the stairs, they saw Fletcher standing outside, and when he turned and noticed them, a scowl passed over his face. Fletcher was in anything but an enviable frame of mind. He stood to lose all he possessed, and a good deal more, over the Cup, if Caloola managed to get home. The man was reckless, and he cared not what he did. He had made many rash wagers during the night, and he was anxious to hear how the betting was going upstairs. Fletcher did not venture into that 'holy of holies'; there were too many men there had got his measure. Still, he was well enough known as a man with a certain amount of money, and there were people quite ready to bet with him. He placed himself directly in the way of Marston and Lord Mayfield as they came out, and the former could not avoid pushing up against him in the crowd.

'Mind where you're going,' rudely said Fletcher. 'I suppose you imagine all the pavement was made for you.'

'Don't excite yourself, my good fellow,' coolly said Marston. 'You're evidently out of sorts, and to-morrow night I fancy you will be numbered amongst the missing.'

Fletcher turned white with rage, and completely lost his head.

'You'll be the man missing,' he hissed; 'and Caloola will lose for a certainty. I suppose your aristocratic friend will pay your debts.'

Had the place been less public, it is probable Fletcher would have received a thrashing on the spot. Marston, however, controlled himself, and Lord Mayfield pushed him aside.

'I'd like to let him feel the weight of my fist,' said Jack. 'By Jove! Mayfield, it's too much to stand from a scoundrel like that.'

They reached Ravenswood in good time, and found the ladies anxiously awaiting their arrival. There was very little gaiety that night. Too much depended on the morrow for them to be very joyful.

Edith Kingdon, whose loving heart could detect the slightest change in the man she had given her life to, saw the anxious look upon Marston's face. He strolled out on to the veranda, and presently she followed. There was nothing unwomanly in her doing so. She had a true sympathy for Marston, and she could see he was ill at ease.

She laid her hand lovingly upon his shoulder.

'You are downcast to-night, Jack,' she said. 'Tell me all the trouble. Oh, how I wish there were no horse-racing! It seems such a constant worry and anxiety to men.'

Marston brightened up as he felt her loving touch, and looked into her bright, sweet face.

'I am anxious, Edith,' he replied. 'So much depends upon to-morrow. The money I do not care about for itself, but, as you know, dearest, there is much more at stake. Our happiness is so interwoven with Caloola's victory that I hardly dare to contemplate his defeat. And yet there were ominous signs to-night that all was not well. There is treachery somewhere, and that scamp Fletcher and some members of the ring are in it. You hardly understand these things, Edith, and I trust you never will do. I shall never venture such another stake as this.'

'Oh, Jack! why do you not trust me? I have told you Caloola's victory matters very little to us if you will only accept what I have to give you,' she said.

'I do trust you, Edith, and you are a true woman, but I cannot accept such a bargain, as it were. Then you must recollect your father is also dependent a great deal upon the result of the race. When I think of it I feel I can hardly bear to be present on the course to-morrow, the excitement will be so great.'

'Think what it will be for me, Jack,' she replied.

He looked at her fondly, and he fancied the suspense of the last few weeks had told its tale upon the fair face. It looked wan and pale, and there was a weary, vacant gaze about the eyes he loved to see meet his in mute confidence. He rose, and they walked up and down the veranda in the cool night breeze. Nature looked at her loveliest. The pale, soft light of the moon shone out, and lit up the scene with a magician's wand. The perfume of the flowers floated on the breeze. How quiet it all seemed! So different from the roar and excitement of the course. They said little. Their hearts were too full, but there was a communion between them far stronger than mere words. They each felt instinctively that unspoken thoughts were best. Mute sympathy gives more relief than utterances of fervid vows. At last they parted, and as Edith passed into the room he kissed her passionately and bid her a fond good-night. Then Marston leaned with his arms over the veranda, and listened to the distant murmur of the sea, and it soothed him. His thoughts wandered to that far-off land, and he pictured to himself the old home where he had been reared as a boy. He could hear the old Squire's cheery voice, and it seemed to say to him once more, 'Courage, Jack; all will be well.' He saw, as he looked into the moonlight night, that lovely Derbyshire valley, and he fancied he heard the sweet song of the nightingale. Then he was once more in the horse paddocks with faithful Ike, looking at the thoroughbreds and criticising their points, with kindly hints from the old stud-groom. Marston had great faith in Ike, and when he thought of Caloola being in his hands he felt safer. He vowed if he won the heavy stake he would go to the old land once more. He would take Edith with him, and the Squire would find in her a second daughter. How long he meditated he knew not, but Lord Mayfield came up and said:

'Nice company you are, Marston. All the people have gone to bed, and there's not a soul to have a chat with. Besides, it's late, old man, and quite time we turned in.'

'I've been having a think, Mayfield,' said Marston. 'It's done me good, and relieved my feelings somewhat. As you say, it is quite time we retired.'

'To-morrow will be a heavy day,' said Lord Mayfield. 'So we had better prepare for it by a good rest.'

'Yes, it will be a heavy day,' replied Marston. 'I hope it may turn out happy for all of us.'

'I trust so, Marston. Good-night,' said Lord Mayfield, and the two men shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MELBOURNE CUP.

At last the weeks of weary suspense were about to be ended. The die was to be thrown, and upon its cast much depended. Cup Day—a real glorious Melbourne Cup Day. Much the same as other Cup days, no doubt, but still full of varied interest, and to the observer different from other similar days. The Melbourne Cup Day is the greatest carnival in the Victorian capital. It is looked forward to for months to come, and it is a real, genuine people's holiday. People who have never seen the Melbourne Cup would be loath to believe all that can be written about it. I have seen many magnificent spectacles, but as a racing picture Flemington on Cup Day surpasses them all. It is simply a magnificent pageant. No race meeting in the world could be better managed. How such a vast crowd can be taken to and from the course with such a minimum of discomfort is a mystery. The Cup Day of which I write, and which was of such vast importance to our friends who have been going 'with the tide,' was a glorious one. Occasionally it is boiling hot at Cup time. The sun glares down and makes racing anything but a pleasure. The flowers droop under the scorching heat, and even the water-lilies in the fountains hang their heads. The unfortunate ladies placed in conspicuous parties on the stand for hours before the race

look languid and limp. The men are thirsty and irritable. Even the waiters, generally the most even-tempered of men, give way to outbursts of spleen. A misty haze hovers over the whole scene. But on the Cup Day of which I write all is changed. There is a nice cool breeze, with just enough sunshine to touch up the scene and give it sufficient brightness. The flowers are gay, and the lawn is bright with ladies whose toilettes actually put to shame the brilliant costumes of Caloola's Derby Day. It was a real, genuine, pleasure-loving race-day. Thousands—there must have been a hundred thousand people there. Never had there been so much excitement over the race since its institution. The sensational nature of Caloola's history had made that horse the hero of the hour with the public. It was well known that Marston and his friends stood to win a huge fortune over the result, and it was also known that many men would be ruined if Caloola won.

The Hill was packed with a dense mass of people. On no racecourse in the world is there such a grand stand as the Hill at Flemington. To-day it is a seething mass of people, all good-tempered, clean-looking, and sober. They enjoy themselves rationally. There is none of the coarse horseplay of Epsom Derby or Doncaster St. Leger Day. The stand is packed hours before the race. Those who prefer luncheon and picnic to betting and racing have ample space in which to enjoy themselves.

Then down on the flat there is an enormous crowd, and far away on the surrounding high land overlooking the course are thousands of people. It is a wonderful sight, more especially for a young country like Australia.

The lawn is perfect as a picture of all that is beautiful. Well kept, well laid out. Garden of flowers, fountains of water. Beautiful women, fine-looking men. Envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness are no doubt there, but are not seen. In the ring there is already a babel of sound, and 'I'll bet on the Cup' is the hoarse shout of the bookmaker. In the cool shade of the paddock there is a little peace and quiet, and it is here that the final glance at the horses takes place. A book could be written about Flemington and its history. It is merely necessary here to relate what occurred there. Suffice it to say the scene is

simply grand, and words almost fail to describe it truthfully.

It was a terrible bore to Marston to have to answer so many questions. Scores of men he knew, and scores he did not know, were all eyes to see the owner of Caloola, and hear what chance the heavily backed one had. He was quite the hero of the hour, much to his disgust. The owner of a popular Melbourne Cup candidate is public property for the time being, and he can no more escape the curiosity of the crowd than the Governor of the colony; in fact, for the time being the Governor is a secondary personage.

Lord Mayfield had taken precautions to see that good seats were procured on the stand in a conspicuous position. It is surprising what money will do, and in this instance it had obtained one of the best positions without much trouble. There was great excitement as the Mayfield party arrived, and the presence of Edith Kingdon, Lady Mayfield and a crowd of fashionable people with them caused a sensation. But one of the party at least took but little notice of what was said or the field of glasses levelled at her. Edith Kingdon was looking brilliant, but the hectic flush upon her cheek showed the heightened colour was not quite natural.

Lady Mayfield, knowing what was at stake, was exceedingly kind to her. She spoke words of comfort and encouragement, and performed sundry small acts of courtesy as woman only can and knows how to do. Edith Kingdon never forgot this in after-days. Lord Mayfield and Marston, as might have been expected, were busy in the paddock and the ring.

They took but little heed of the minor events, having too much at stake upon the great race of the day.

Ike had arrived with Caloola, and Wells was also there. The horse looked a perfect picture. His coat shone like satin, and his condition could not be found fault with. And yet there was something about him good judges did not like. 'Short of a winding-up gallop,' said some, and he did look a shade on the big side. However, as he walked slowly about the paddock there was no sign of lameness, but he had his fore-hoof bound up tightly, and a bar-shoe on. Storey was there attending to his charge, and many were the anxious questions he had to answer. Caloola seemed to have lost his bad temper, for he took the attention of the

crowd remarkably well. He seemed to know, with that intelligence always to be found in the blood horse, that something great was expected from him that day. His sagacious eyes fairly sparkled and showed the indomitable spirit within. And he would need it all to-day. The great cracks of the season were to run against him, and he had to give weight to some first-class old horses. Such a field of really good racehorses had not been seen at Flemington for years. No wonder people were excited, and as the time approached for the great race to be decided the crowd surged madly about in all directions. First one rumour and then another was set afloat. Corisande had gone back in the betting. There had been a great rush on Wild Dyrell. Tarana had been knocked out. Chorister was started merely for 'sweep money.' Rainbow was under a cloud. Caloola showed symptoms of lameness again. Euchre was the mount of Power, and so on. What were the public to back? If a man had a fancy, he was put on to something else before he backed it. Every horse in the race carried some money, and there were twenty starters on the board yet. Some men had 'gone for' half a dozen, others for two or three, and very few for a 'single.'

The stand seethed with an excited, well-dressed crowd. Sweeps were drawn, and hundreds of pairs of gloves betted.

Lord Mayfield's party had gone in for the customary pound sweep, and Lady Mayfield was gloriously delighted at having drawn Caloola, whilst Edith Kingdon felt rather depressed at the receipt of Wild Dyrell. On every part of the course, save the track, there was a teeming mass of excited people.

'There goes the first bell,' said one of the party.

'Our fates will soon be decided,' whispered Lady Mayfield to Edith Kingdon.

'Our fates,' sighed Edith. 'Your fate is settled, and it is a happy one.'

'I sometimes think this race will really settle my fate,' said Lady Mayfield gloomily.

How true this surmise was will be found subsequently.

'Will Mr. Marston rejoin us before the race?' said a gentleman of the party.

'I hardly think he will,' said Edith.

'He will be busy to the last minute with the horse and Wells, and it will be too late for him to get here then.'

'And I expect my husband will remain with him,' said Lady Mayfield. 'They are such a devoted pair; and then we have several gentlemen to take care of us,' she said with a touch of her old archness.

In one part of the paddock could be seen men in earnest conversation. They attracted the notice of several passers-by. One was Fletcher, the other Wells. Their communications seemed to be of importance.

'Recollect this makes or does for you,' said Fletcher to the jockey.

'I shan't forget it in a hurry,' said Wells. 'How much is it to be?'

'Five thousand and the letter,' said Fletcher.

'All right. I don't like the job, but the horse is as good as dead.'

'Hush! there's Marston,' said Fletcher, as he hurried away. 'Remember, if you play me false I'll kill you!' he hissed between his teeth. 'I'm a desperate man, and shan't stop at a trifle.'

Wells turned pale. That last threat frightened him. He knew Fletcher well, and he felt he was capable of carrying out his threat. Losing his life was a far different matter to the threat of a forged cheque being disclosed. He was visibly agitated and nervous when Marston and Lord Mayfield came up.

'What's the matter, Wells? you look scared to death,' said Marston.

'Oh, it's nothing, sir, but I feel the responsibility is so great,' said Wells.

Marston eyed him keenly.

'You were talking to Fletcher. What does it mean?' he said.

Again the deadly pallor came over the jockey's face, and both of them saw it. 'It means nothing, Mr. Marston. The man has a terrible hold over me. I shall ride for my life to-day,' said Wells.

'If you play us false I'll have you horsewhipped off the course,' angrily said Lord Mayfield.

'Hush; don't be hard on him,' said Marston quietly

Come, tell me all about it, Wells. I know I can trust you.'

'I would rather not say a word about it,' said Wells. 'I will ride for you Mr. Marston, as I have never ridden before. If my skill can get Caloola home I'll do it. It will give me my revenge;' and Wells's eyes flashed.

'Would you like anything?' said Marston.

'A glass of champagne might steady my nerves. I've had nothing yet,' said Wells.

'You shall have it,' said Marston, and they went away to obtain it.

'He's turned mouse, has he?' said an ill-looking man who had been standing close by the group, and heard Wells's reply to Marston. 'I must tell Fletcher. There's only one chance for us now. It's desperate, but I fancy it can be done. At all events, "Spider" said it must be tried as a last resort if Wells wavered.'

The man hurried off and found Fletcher with Messrs. Isaacs and Moss.

'What's up now?' said Fletcher.

'He's turned us over,' gasped the man.

Fletcher staggered back as though he had been struck, and Isaacs and Moss looked paralyzed almost with fear.

'He daren't do it,' hissed Fletcher. 'It's more than his life's worth.'

'He'll do it right enough. Them swells has got round him,' said the ruffian.

'What's to be done? There's only half an hour,' said Moss.

'Hocus him,' said Fletcher.

'Can't be done; he'll not drink,' said Moss.

'D—— his drinking, I've something better than drink for him. Here, Bandy,' Fletcher said to the man who had brought the unwelcome intelligence, 'come with me.'

The pair hurried off to the quietest spot they could find.

'He must be chloroformed,' said Fletcher.

'Who's to do it?' said Bandy.

'I'll pour some on this handkerchief. I've brought it as the last chance. You've played the spy on him well, Bandy, and you shall be paid handsomely. You must take this handkerchief at once and go straight to the paddock. Wells

will be watching Caloola saddle up, and there'll be a crowd. Go close to him and then trip him and roll on him. You can sham drunk. Jamb the handkerchief over his mouth and nose as long as you can whilst on the ground with him, and he'll not be fit to ride when he gets up, even if he can speak.'

'And what's to become of me? They'll lynch me when they find it out. It's more nor my life's worth, "Spider,"' said Bandy.

'You've done rougher jobs than that and got out of 'em,' said Fletcher. 'There'll be such a crowd around, it's odds you get clear away after they pull you apart.'

'How much?' said Bandy.

'Fifty pounds if you do it.'

'Make it a hundred, and I'm on,' said Bandy.

Fletcher saw there was no time to be lost, and with an oath he assented. He gave Bandy the handkerchief, well saturated with the fatal drug, and the man ran off.

Bandy made his way towards Caloola's stall, and there he saw Wells standing a little apart from the crowd. He pushed about like a half-drunken man, and got kicked and cuffed for his pains. But Bandy had been used to this all his life, and took no notice of it.

'Hic! yer ride Caloola?' he said to Wells.

'Get out, you drunken beast,' said the jockey, as Bandy lurched up against him.

'Who's drunk? You're 'nother, hic!' And Bandy lurched against him again, at the same time quickly tripping the jockey backwards. He fell on the top of Wells, and in a second had the handkerchief over his nose and mouth, pressed so hard that the chloroform fairly choked him.

A rush was made at the man, but Bandy stuck so tight that it was half a minute or more before he could be got off. At last a more furious try than the rest sent him flying back amongst the crowd, who, as crowds usually do, passed him on, so that by the time Bandy had got fairly on his feet he was some yards off Wells and the group around him. He staggered for a few paces, and then ran for his bare life, the handkerchief still in his hand. He dodged about amongst the crowd, and finally edged his way out. Considering the crowded state of the paddock and the

activity of the man this was more easily done than could have been imagined.

How was Wells? Ike rushed through the crowd, with the saddle on his arm, and got hold of the jockey. Wells was on his feet, but he seemed dazed, and would have fallen had not Ike caught him in his arms, and as he did so he let the saddle fall. Then Wells swooned away.

'Great Heavens! They've hocussed him!' said Ike, 'and it's only twenty minutes before the race.'

The news spread like wildfire. 'Marston's jockey had been drugged.'

For one moment the men in the paddock could not understand it. When they realized the fact they roared for vengeance. But Bandy had got a clear start of them, and could not be found.

'Heaven help me, Mayfield! I'm ruined,' said Marston, as he heard what Ike had to say and saw Wells in a deep swoon in his arms.

'We must get another jockey, quick!' said Lord Mayfield. 'Now's the time to act.'

'Can't be done,' said Marston.

'I'll give a thousand pounds to the man who'll let me have a decent jockey,' excitedly said Lord Mayfield. 'I'll go at once to the stewards and see what can be done.' He hurried off, and left Marston, Ike, and the still stupefied Wells in the midst of a sympathizing crowd.

'Mind the horse, Mr. Marston,' said Ike, 'while I see Wells into the jockeys' room.'

'Be quick,' said Marston.

Willing hands assisted Ike to carry poor Wells away, and once he saw the jockey safe, Ike disappeared. He hurried to the weighing-room and communicated with the clerk of the scales, and then he went to the stewards. He made certain statements, and then off he rushed to the jockeys' room, where lay poor Wells and the saddle by his side, which had been brought in by one of the men who assisted to carry him there.

Ike stripped off the scarlet jacket from the jockey, and then tugged at his top-boots. Off they came, and the breeches followed. Then Ike underwent as rapid a transformation as the harlequin can effect in a pantomime.

Scarlet jacket, fit loose; breeches tight, put on with a struggle; and then, with a tug like a Jack Tar's haul, on came the boots.

Ike picked up the saddle and rushed into the weighing-room. The clerk of the scales was there.

'What mount?' said the clerk.

'Caloola,' said Ike.

The scale bumped at 7 st. 6 lb.

'Declare 2 lb. over,' said Ike.

'Where's the owner?' said the clerk.

'Here,' said Marston, who, unable to restrain himself any longer, had left the horse in charge of the lad and rushed to the weighing-room.

'Who rides my horse?' he said.

'I do,' said Ike quietly.

The effect was electrical. The few people still in the room cheered, and the crowd got the whisper and took it up outside.

Marston was as one in a dream. He looked at the old stud-groom as he stood there in the bright scarlet jacket, and then, unable to restrain himself any longer, he fell on old Ike's neck, and tears from this strong man came fast, as he realized what the faithful fellow had done.

'No time to lose, Master Jack,' said Ike, as he gently put Marston away, and then he hurried off to the horse.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOW IKE RODE CALOOLA.

As Ike made his way to Caloola he was followed by an excited and angry crowd. The love of fair play is inherent in the mass of race-goers, and they resented the despicable attempt that had been made upon Wells in order to prevent Caloola from running. The majority were, of course, unaware of the true nature of the case, but they instinctively felt that something was wrong. When Ike came in view with the scarlet jacket flashing, and the saddle on his arm, they cheered him again and again. Bookmakers and backers alike recognised that Ike was doing a daring and risky

thing. He had, it is true, ridden Caloola more than once at exercise, and the horse was fond of him, but Ike had never ridden in a race for the Melbourne Cup: and what was still more, he had not taken part in a real good gallop for some years.

But as Ike hurried across to the horse he took in the situation at a glance. He knew the odds were against him, but he had every confidence in his own powers.

'I used to be a good judge of pace,' he thought, 'and my hands were considered light. My nerve I can rely upon, and I must just take things as they come. Caloola has a great turn of speed, and if I can manage to save him for a brilliant run home I'll beat the lot. Lucky I had a jockey's as well as a trainer's license; but hang me if I didn't think there would be something of this kind happen.'

It took Ike very little time to saddle up Caloola. The lad in charge stared at him, thunderstruck to see his master going to ride in the Cup.

'He's fair mad,' thought the youngster.

Ike was anything but mad. And as he was lightly lifted into the saddle, and fixed himself firmly in the seat, the crowd of experienced men around saw he was no novice at his business. Ike sat the horse like a statue. As he moved towards the gate another cheer was heard, and Ike smiled—a quiet, confident smile. He felt almost sure of victory, he said afterwards. Such a sensational incident had never taken place at Flemington, for the majority of the people on the lawn, stand, hill and flat, had no knowledge of what had occurred. When, therefore, Caloola came on to the course, just as the bulk of the horses reached the post, there was a murmur of suppressed excitement.

The non-appearance of Caloola had caused his hundreds of backers much uneasiness. Ike let the horse walk quietly up the track.

'Good Heavens! that's not Wells,' was the exclamation heard on all sides.

'What's up now?' 'Why have they changed jockeys?' 'That's the trainer on him!' 'An old 'un like that can never ride him!' 'Our money's as good as lost!' 'Wonder how it happened?' And such like exclamations were hastily uttered.

As might have been expected, Lord Mayfield's party were anxious to see Caloola come out for his gallop, and the delay in his appearance caused them much wonderment. They could not surmise as to what could possibly be the matter. Neither Lord Mayfield nor Marston had been near the party since they went to attend to the preliminary preparations.

'What can it mean?' said Edith Kingdon, who was in a highly nervous condition.

'Some delay in saddling. Perhaps the horse is restless,' said Lady Mayfield. 'Don't be alarmed, Edith; I'm sure all will be right.'

When Caloola did make his appearance, Lady Mayfield, who had her glasses levelled at him, gave an exclamation of surprise.

'What can be the matter?' she said.

'What is wrong?' asked Edith hastily.

'Wells is not riding,' said Lady Mayfield.

'Wells not riding?' exclaimed several of the party in a breath.

'No; it's the trainer in the saddle. What can have happened to Wells? He must have been got at at the last minute.'

Edith Kingdon was too alarmed to say anything. She sank back on the seat in a half-fainting condition.

'All is lost,' she said hopelessly, and her face looked pained and drawn. 'I don't care for myself, but my poor Jack, he'll be ruined,' she said.

'Don't say that, Edith. Cheer up. Ike Thurton, Mr. Marston told me, was an excellent jockey, and depend upon it, he'll ride for his life.'

Lady Mayfield cheered Edith up as best she could, but inwardly she felt a sinking at her heart.

'It is the beginning of the end,' she murmured. 'There's some more of Fletcher's work in this. How will it all finish?' and she gave a slight shudder.

Meanwhile Caloola was walking quietly up the course, Ike being apparently as cool as the proverbial cucumber.

Another man had caught sight of the scarlet jacket as it passed out at the gate. That man was Fletcher, and his countenance was horrible to behold.

When he saw who had mounted Caloola he gave vent to a torrent of curses. He had never thought of this. Of all men in the world he had never expected to see Ike Thurton up. Get a moderate jockey at the last minute he thought they might, but Ike—well, it was horrible!

Fletcher's face was pale with rage. His bloodless lip, his glaring eye, his convulsed frame, all betokened a man suffering the agonies of hell upon earth. At that moment his cup was full. He felt he was lost. He had a presentiment that Ike Thurton would ride the winner, and at that moment he would rather have seen Wells in the saddle than the old stud-groom.

'Curse him! May the ground open and swallow him up. I hope to h—— the horse will break his neck and his rider's too.'

As he uttered this impious wish another cheer came from the crowd, and he knew it was for Caloola and his rider.

He wished to slink away and not watch the race, but he was wedged securely amongst the crowd on the stand and he could not go.

Lord Mayfield had led Jack Marston quietly away, and they had obtained a corner on the stewards' stand. There was much sympathy shown for Marston, and he felt, although it was kindly meant, they all thought the race as good as lost. When he had time to think he felt a ray of hope. He knew what a daring, fearless rider Ike had been in days gone by, and the man had a nerve of iron. He felt that Ike would ride as for dear life, and even at such a moment and in such a place he felt he could trust to Providence to win him the race.

And what was Smirk doing all this time? He heard of the desperate attack upon Wells, and he was on the track of Bandy, whom he had the satisfaction of securing and handing into safe custody. Then he watched Ike on Caloola, and vowed that he would take Fletcher that very night.

A murmur of surprised admiration came from the vast crowd. Nearly half a million people were intent upon watching Ike and Caloola gallop down the track.

With his horse well in hand, sitting as firm as a rock, Ike

let Caloola glide along. What a stride! How the beautiful chestnut swept over the ground with swift, greyhound-like motion! He gathered his hind legs well under him, and every stride denoted power and confidence. Swift as the swallow he came down the track, moving along with real poetry of motion.

And the man was as fine a sight as the horse. Noble, daring, Ike felt this must be a race for life. He would face all dangers. He would risk everything in order to win. As he felt Caloola's giant stride, and tried with firm but gentle hand how he answered to the bit, Ike's spirit rose. He had ridden many good horses in his time, but never had he had such a galloper as Caloola under him.

'If his hoof stands he'll win,' muttered Ike to himself triumphantly. 'What a mess he'll make of 'em over that last seven furlongs! I feel quite young again. Good lad. Steady, boy,' he said, as he eased Caloola's stride. The horse seemed quite tractable.

'Magnificent,' said Lord Mayfield. 'By Jove, Marston, Wells could not sit the horse better himself.'

'He certainly has a fine seat,' said Jack. 'He's getting old, though, and I'm afraid he'll never last the distance.'

'He will. He's a hero, that man, Marston,' said Lord Mayfield.

'He's the bravest friend a man ever had. He has no thought for himself. Poor Wells; I hope he'll recover. He was true to the last, and he shall never repent it,' said Marston.

No time for conversation now. The horses are at the post, and the flag is up.

Half a million people breathless with excitement. A magnificent sight. The vast crowd hushed in suspense. Presently their pent-up feelings will break forth in a tremendous shout. In a few minutes all will be over.

A false start. Corisande, Wild Dyrell, and Shotgun have broken away. Caloola remains quietly at the post, and they can see Ike is stroking the chestnut's neck.

'Heavens! how will Edith stand this?' said Marston, as he wiped the beads of perspiration from his hot brow.

'Lady Mayfield will attend to her. Have no fear, Jack; they are all right. Nerve yourself, my boy. It's a horrid

strain, but it will soon be all over,' said Lord Mayfield. 'I'm certain——'

He had not time to finish the sentence. A terrific shout from the crowd proclaims they are 'off.' The race had commenced, the flag had dropped, and Wild Dyrell, attended by Corisande, had got a clear lead. Caloola was lying nearer last than first, and was on the inside running. As they entered the course proper Corisande, determined to make the best of the light weight, took up the running, and led past the stand. Then came Euchre, Wild Dyrell, Captain Cook, Perfection, Conscript, and Caloola, with the remainder bunched.

'He's going well,' was the general comment as Caloola swept along with the horses.

All interest appeared to be centred in the 'jockey trainer' who had so unexpectedly mounted the most sensational horse in the race. Ike was holding his horse well in hand, and Marston noticed he had a pleased, confident look upon his face.

They swept round the turn at a fair pace, and along the back stretch Ike gradually drew up on Caloola.

'He's riding a great race,' said Marston.

Fletcher saw it all, and groaned in his agony. The man's face was terrible to see. It worked and twitched convulsively, and he seemed in danger of having a fit.

Edith Kingdon kept her eyes fixed on that bright scarlet jacket as if her life depended on it. Corisande then held the lead, going well, and the pace began to improve. As they passed the sheds and approached the abattoirs Wild Dyrell drew up, and Horatio followed. The favourite, however, still kept ahead, going great guns. Shotgun, Captain Cook, Tarana, Perfection, and Caloola were well up, and a long tail had commenced to spread out.

Rounding the bend Ike let Caloola get up a stride or two, and Perfection followed straight in his track. On they came. Glasses levelled, men and women standing on the tip-toe of expectation. So far it had been a great race.

'It's anybody's race yet.' 'Corisande will win if he can stay home. Made all his own running too.' 'The light weight will pull him through,' were the exclamations heard.

Marston was terribly excited, as well he might be.

Ike was watching for an opening like a cat watching a mouse.

Round the home turn Corisande was first to show, and then came Euchre, Shotgun, and Captain Cook, with Tarana and Caloola next.

A cry of horror from the vast crowd. A scramble, a falling horse, and Tarana lay on the ground still as death, with the jockey thrown some yards away on the course.

'Great heavens, Ike's down!' said Marston.

For an instant the scarlet jacket seemed to fly over Caloola's head. The shock had flung Ike almost out of the saddle, but with an almost superhuman effort he righted himself again, pulled Caloola together and got him into his stride. The interference had, however, cost him several lengths. People who saw it clearly said there had seldom been such a display of good jockeyship.

Ike watched his opportunity. He did not bustle Caloola, but let him regain some lost ground. Then he galloped in pursuit of Corisande, Euchre, Perfection, Wild Dyrell, Captain Cook, and Rob Roy.

What a race! What excitement!

Edith Kingdon could not look at it any longer. She sat down and hid her face in her hands.

Lady Mayfield stood pale and resolute, watching the bright scarlet jacket dancing in the sunlight.

On crept Caloola. Stride upon stride he gained on the leaders. Ike had not even given him a reminder yet.

Marston shook with the terrible strain of excitement he suffered from.

Fletcher watched that fatal red jacket gaining at every stride, and he felt his fate was sealed.

The distance is reached, and now the crowd shout themselves hoarse. 'Corisande wins! The favourite wins!' comes from a thousand throats. The leader was going well, and seemed all over a winner.

'Perfection! Perfection!' is the next cry to reach Edith Kingdon's ears.

A moment's silence. What can it be? She must look, even if it shatter all her hopes.

Hesitatingly she arose from the seat and looked at the advancing horses.

What is this she sees? A scarlet jacket coming on the outside like a flash of lightning. The pace was terrific. The man sat like a model; the horse tore over the ground like a machine. 'Could it be possible? Might Caloola win? Would Ike get up in time? Heaven protect him!' were the thoughts that flashed through Edith's mind in a few brief seconds.

'Could it be possible?'

What is this great shout that rends the air like thunder? What is it that makes Marston's hat wave high in the air? What is it makes Edith Kingdon start, and clutch convulsively at Lady Mayfield's arm? What is it that makes Lady Mayfield wave her perfumed handkerchief and then clap her dainty hands with frantic joy? What is it that makes people on the Hill seethe with excitement? What is it makes Fletcher turn green and white and many colours of a faded hue? What is it makes the heart of thousands rejoice?

It is the cry from thousands upon thousands of throats:

'Caloola wins!' 'Caloola wins!'

This terrible roar of human thunder echoes into the room where poor Wells lies, tended by careful hands. It has an electrical effect on the prostrate jockey.

He opens his eyes. He gazes around.

'Where am I? What's that shout?'

'Caloola wins,' said one of the attendants.

'Thank God!' groaned the jockey and relapsed again.

The half distance is reached. The struggle is nearly over. A race for life, indeed, it is.

Corisande has a bare half length to the good.

With giant strides the brilliant chestnut son of Chester comes dashing along. The scarlet jacket shows clear, and Ike sits still as death. His keen eye is watching the lad on Corisande. The light-weight has ridden a great race, but he has not the experience of Ike.

As he sees the scarlet jacket alongside him, and Ike never moving a muscle, he fancies Caloola must be full of go. He must make an effort or lose the race.

Up went the whip, and as it flashed before Ike's eyes, his whole face gleamed with satisfaction.

He was riding a beaten horse, and no man knew it. He

felt Caloola failing under him. He must 'kid' the jockey of Corisande or lose the race. With nerves strung to their highest tension, he held his horse together, and never stirred.

'He'll think I'm winning easily,' thought Ike.

As soon as the jockey hit Corisande, the horse swerved.

Here was Ike's chance. They were within twenty yards of the winning-post. Ike raised his whip, cut Caloola with terrible force, and drove both spurs home. The gallant beaten horse, with that pluck characteristic of the thoroughbred, made one great effort. Ike could almost hear him groan, and even in that moment of supreme excitement it touched his heart.

But the effort had told.

Past the post the horses flashed almost locked together.

'What's won?' 'What's won?' 'Caloola!' 'Caloola!' 'Corisande!' 'Corisande!'

Only the judge could decide.

The awful suspense of that moment just before the numbers went up was like a lifetime of agony to Marston and Edith Kingdon.

At last!

Nos. 10, 16, 2—Caloola, Corisande, Euchre—and the judge's verdict a short head.

And then the crowd cheered and danced and waved their hats as only a Melbourne Cup crowd can cheer a Melbourne Cup winner. People went almost mad with excitement.

As Ike came back with Caloola it could be seen the chestnut was dead lame. He could barely walk into the weighing-ring. How they cheered! They cried aloud for Marston, they hurrahed for Ike. It was a proud moment for the old stud-groom as he returned to weigh in. He took off the scarlet cap, and his close-cropped iron-gray hair showed the crowd he was not by any means a young man.

And the proudest moment of his life was when, after weighing and the welcome 'All right' had been given, 'Master Jack' came and took him by the hand, and, shaking it in a grasp of iron, said:

'The second time you have saved my life, Ike. May God bless and guard you!'

Marston could say no more. He was overcome with the revulsion of feeling.

Lord Mayfield was beside himself with joy. As Ike passed out of the weighing-room the crowd grew frantic. They would have carried him shoulder-high could they have got at him.

Never in his life had Ike felt such a glow of triumph in his veins.

And Edith Kingdon? The dearest wish of her heart was realised, and brave, noble-hearted old Ike Thurton had ridden the race and won her the man she loved.

'Caloola's Cup' is an historical event, and will be handed down as the most remarkable turf episode for years to come.

What of Fletcher?

Ruined, degraded, deserted by his comrades in villainy, pursued by the relentless Smirk, hated by the vast crowd who had learnt of the dastardly act he had played upon Marston, he slunk away, and reached Melbourne safely. Drink was his only solace, and it was to this he flew. He meant to have one more chance for life if possible, and it must be through Lady Mayfield.

Caloola was taken home at once, and the only regret Ike had was when he looked at the two deep spur-marks and thought they had driven the gallant horse to victory.

To Marston and Lord Mayfield he had merely said:

'To-morrow we shall have time to talk, and I will tell you how I rode the race.'

Wells was taken to Thurton's house, where he steadily recovered. He was almost heartbroken to think he had missed riding the winner, but the kindness he received on all hands somewhat soothed his grief.

And when the ringmen met together and compared notes, they arrived at the conclusion that 'Marston's crowd' must have netted £80,000 besides the sweep.

Dick Bodon had a real good win with Smirk's two sovs., and Reginald Hatherstone had just a fiver on the double. There were great rejoicings at Ravenswood that night, but Lady Mayfield, usually so light-hearted and gay, seemed oppressed. She had a presentiment of coming evil, and the image of Fletcher appeared like a horrible phantom in the midst of her dreams.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN INTERVIEW.

THE day of suspense was over. The victory was won, and such a triumph. Never in the history of the Melbourne Cup had such a grand coup been accomplished. Marston was a rich man. Kingdon was some thousands to the good. Ike had landed the big sweep. Lord Mayfield had considerably increased his banker's balance. Wells reaped the reward he so justly deserved, and some scores of the public rejoiced over Caloola's victory.

Ike had explained the whole circumstances connected with his wonderful ride, and it was generally conceded he had accomplished a great feat. An interview with the hero of the day appeared in the *Argus*, and thus the public became aware for the first time of the many strange and mysterious circumstances surrounding Caloola's victory. There being no need for further reticence, Ike unburdened himself freely, and his statement caused a profound sensation.

Wells had succeeded in obtaining the note from the landlord of the Silver Flagon, who had made some excuse to Fletcher when he called for it. He burnt that fatal cheque, and with it he reduced the past to ashes. The joy of Marston and Edith Kingdon can well be imagined. Edith had related what a terrible ordeal the race had been for her, and how fearful she was of success when Ike was seen on the back of Caloola. They were happy in each other's happiness, and Caloola's victory had sealed their fate.

Smirk was almost mad with joy. For a detective he behaved in the most ludicrous manner. He gathered half-a-dozen choice spirits around him, amongst them being Bodon and Hatherstone, and regaled them with a royal supper. Smirk had a habit of being familiar and talking freely, and he always considered that was how he obtained more information than other people. He was eager to get on the track of Fletcher.

The concluding days of the meeting had filled Fletcher's cup of bitterness to the brim. He had plunged with the hope of recovering some of his losses, and had sunk deeper

into the mire. Messrs. Isaacs and Moss were demanding Fletcher's share of the losses, and he had not even a £10 note to bless himself with. What ready cash he had he managed to lose, and he was now almost penniless.

It was the Sunday before settling day, and Fletcher sat brooding over the results of the past week. The man was strangely altered. It was not the keen cunning 'Spider' of old that sat with his elbows on the table, and his head clasped in his hands gazing vacantly. His cheeks were sunken, and his eyes were weary and dead for want of sleep. He was in a terribly nervous, excitable, and dangerous condition. The man seemed to be hovering on the verge of madness. He had been a bad man, and the sins of his past life crowded before his memory. Do what he would, he could not put them aside. They haunted him sleeping and waking. His hands were stained with the blood of a comrade, and his soul was doubly perjured. There he sat this beautiful balmy Sunday afternoon, alone, with not a single friend in the world. And yet he was not alone. Better for him had he been struck dead on the spot, than live to meditate further crimes. In that still quiet room he seemed solitary, and yet every chair was filled with a horrid unreal shadowy form. He had been drinking brandy heavily, and his brain was active but not clear.

As he glanced around he shuddered. He looked at the chair opposite to him, and there sat Miguel's ghastly form as he saw it when he died. He tried to hide his face from the sight, and turned away. In the far corner of the room he fancied he saw a little innocent babe dead and cold. Again he moved in his seat. He turned quite round and saw, in his terror, the faces of Hatherstone and an old man worn out with grief and suffering, and the death-like countenance of poor 'jockey Willie.'

It was horrible. Fletcher rang the bell violently and called for brandy. He must drink. He felt he should kill himself if he did not gain some mock courage. He drank deeply. The shadows commenced to fall, it was getting late in the afternoon.

'I must think,' he muttered. 'Curse these devils that haunt my brain. There's no such thing as fate. It's my hard luck. What can I do? I'm ruined. Worse, I owe

some thousands that I can never pay. I must have money. By —— I will have money,' he said, as he raised his clenched fist and brought it down with a crash upon the table, shattering the glass to atoms.

'I'll go this very night. I heard that the two curs had gone to see their cursed trainer. I must see her. It's my last chance. Five thousand pounds will not hurt her, and it would be a cheap price for my lady to pay for silence. She must get it me by to-morrow. Curse her for her fatal beauty. It's been the ruin of me. She's the only weak spot in my heart, if I have any. I'll go now before it gets too late.'

Fletcher had made up his mind to seek an interview with Lady Mayfield, and endeavour to extort from her the money that he required. He was determined to get it at all hazards. He was a desperate man, and at his wits' end. If pleading did not accomplish his object he meant to use threats, and if necessary resort to violence.

In this frame of mind he went out of the house, and walked to the St. Kilda tram. He could not afford a hansom, and he ground his teeth with rage as he rattled the few coins in his pocket and thought that was all he possessed. Arrived at St. Kilda, he made his way to Lord Mayfield's house.

It was a magnificent evening, and the moon was just commencing to shine with a soft, pale light. But Fletcher took no heed of the night. He cared not for the beauties of nature. All within him was black and sinful, and his thoughts were full of dreadful plans. He walked slowly, as if hesitating to face the last chance of retrieving his fallen fortunes. He had a vague idea his mission would be unsuccessful, and yet he cast it aside, and tried to persuade himself that with the power he had to do evil he could work good for himself.

He reached Ravenswood, and commenced to reconnoitre.

A lad came from the house, and he questioned him as to whether Mr. Marston was at home. The youngster replied that Marston and Lord Mayfield had gone to Flemington to see Ike Thurton.

'Some poor devil of a bookmaker come to ask for time,' thought the juvenile.

The lad had invested five shillings on Caloola, and felt like a millionaire. He went off whistling, and looking the picture of happiness and content. Fletcher thought of the contrast between them, and once more his wrath became fearful to behold.

He waited about the house for nearly an hour. At last he saw Lady Mayfield come out alone. She had a basket in her hand, and was evidently going into the garden to cut some flowers. The garden at Ravenswood was well stocked with plants, and there was a beautiful cool shrubbery in which grew any quantity of ferns, embedded in moss, watered by the spray from a fountain, and protected from the sun by high tree-ferns, which made an almost natural bush-house.

Fletcher watched Lady Mayfield eagerly. As soon as he saw her enter the arbour, he climbed the fence and dropped into the grounds.

He cautiously made his way to Lady Mayfield's retreat; and when he reached and peered through the dense mass of foliage, he saw a sight that would have charmed an anchorite. Seated on a mossy sloping bank, surrounded with magnificent ferns, and her lap full of choice flowers, which she was daintily arranging, sat Lady Mayfield. She looked so girlish and innocent in her pure white dress and broad straw hat that Fletcher almost fancied she was some sylvan wood-nymph. The thought flashed through his mind, how like she looked to the Daisy of old, when she was a happy, free, innocent girl, and the 'Spider' had not crossed her path.

But he had no time for moralizing and remorse. He must make his plunge at once ere it be too late.

It seemed like sacrilege for him to break upon her solitude.

For one moment he hesitated, and then crashed through the shrubs that hid him from view, and in a moment stood facing his victim.

Lady Mayfield heard the sound, and started with alarm. By the dull light of the moon, which could barely penetrate the thick foliage, she saw the figure of a man standing before her. She looked again, and fixing her gaze on the object, suddenly discovered who it was.

When she saw that hated form, all her courage came

back. Lady Mayfield was a brave woman, and she had been accustomed to danger. She rose from her seat, drew herself up proudly, and faced him.

'How dare you come here!' she said, with suppressed excitement. 'How dare you!'

Fletcher laughed. It was not a nice laugh, and it made Lady Mayfield again feel that cold shudder of fear pass through her frame.

'Why am I here, my lady,' he said, and his voice sounded hoarse, strange and sepulchral. 'Why am I here? You know why I am here. Your cursed husband and his friend have ruined me. That's why I am here. I am beggared, my proud lady, and I ask you for the sake of old times to help me.'

'So it is true,' said Lady Mayfield calmly.

'What's true?' said Fletcher.

'That Caloola's victory has ruined you,' she said.

'It has. I have not more than ten pounds in the world,' said Fletcher. He was assuming a hypocritical injured air, but inwardly he felt murderous.

'Listen to me, Fletcher,' said Lady Mayfield. 'You have dared to intrude your hateful presence upon me again. You have dared to desecrate the grounds my husband owns, and you have dared to insult him by addressing his wife. God knows, I have suffered bitter wrongs at your hands. You have ruined my past life, which is buried and gone. You have tried to ruin my husband and his best friend. You tried to poison Wells.

'Stop,' she said, as Fletcher was about to speak. 'I have not finished yet. You attempted to lame Caloola, and you entered into a compact to ruin Marston and make yourself a rich man. All your schemes have fallen to the ground. You are the ruined man and they have triumphed. I have no pity for you. As you had no mercy for them I have none for you. Go. Leave this place at once, or I will call the household,' and Lady Mayfield proudly motioned him away.

Fletcher stepped close to her and hissed:

'Take care. I am desperate. Call whom you like, and I will tell them what you are, and who you are. Your past life, my lady, would be nice gossip for the servants' hall.'

'You coward!' she said. 'I am a woman, but you shall not frighten me. Tell what you like. I am Lady Mayfield. They will not believe a ruined gambler like you.'

'But they will believe your old dear love, Reginald Hatherstone, and I can find him in the space of a couple of hours,' said Fletcher.

The dastardly shot hit home. Lady Mayfield almost staggered under the blow, but she quickly recovered herself.

'He's dead,' she said almost in a whisper.

'He's not dead,' said Fletcher. 'I tell you he is alive, and he can tell the history of Miguel's death.'

'Hush! for Heaven's sake,' she said. 'Man, are you a demon? Have you no pity? Why do you revive these terrible memories of the past? Why cannot you leave me in peace? I am beloved, honoured, and respected. You cross my path, and all my roses are withered, and there is nothing left but dead leaves. You say you are ruined. Your life is nothing; you deserve death. I have suffered tortures upon earth, and now I have reached paradise you come and mar my happiness again. Cannot you be contented with your lot? My husband allows you an ample income. Leave me. Do one good redeeming action in your life, and may God forgive you for your past sins, and the terrible wrong you have done me.'

Lady Mayfield spoke earnestly, and at any other time she might have reached Fletcher's stubborn heart. But the man was driven into a corner, and nothing must stand in his way.

'I want money,' he said hoarsely. 'I must have five thousand pounds by noon to-morrow. It's my last chance, my lady, and I will have it.'

Had Fletcher showed the least sign of remorse or repentance he might have fared better. His utter disregard of her appeal made Lady Mayfield once more assume a haughty demeanour.

'Five thousand pounds,' she said. 'Not one single penny shall you get from me. I would see you starve before I would give you a copper. You cowardly wretch, you could insult me because you know I am unprotected. Were Lord Mayfield here, he would thrash you within an inch of your life.'

Fletcher saw his chances of obtaining help were almost gone.

'I must have the money,' he said; 'and you must give it me.'

'Not a single shilling shall you have. Ask Mr. Marston for it. He will, no doubt, pay your debts,' she said.

'Don't drive me to madness,' said Fletcher. 'Hear me,' he groaned: 'I am a broken man. Give me one chance more; I am almost frantic with the terrible sufferings of last week. Daisy—Lady Mayfield—hear me, I implore you. I shall starve. I shall be hunted from place to place like a dog. Give me some help. See, I will go down on my knees for it. I will beg you to save me from worse than death.'

Fletcher knelt at her feet. The man's agony was terrible. Great drops of perspiration stood on his brow. He clutched her dress convulsively. He grovelled at her feet in the most abject misery. For one moment Lady Mayfield pitied him. Then she thought of the wrongs the man had done her, and pity vanished from her heart.

'Get up,' she said. 'You ought to kneel and ask my pardon for a hundred foul wrongs, a thousand bitter insults. It is your proper place at my feet. You hound, I could strike you dead on the ground!'

Her eyes blazed with hatred. She was becoming hysterically nervous.

Fletcher sprang to his feet as if he had been stung.

'I will beg no longer,' he said. 'Hear me out, Lady Mayfield. Money I must and will have, if I tear those cursed jewels from your throat.'

Lady Mayfield was wearing a magnificent diamond brooch, set with brilliants of great value. She saw Fletcher's blood-shot eyes gleam as he caught the flash of the precious stones in the moonlight.

He made a step towards her, but she did not stir. A kind of horrible fascination rooted her to the spot. 'Would the man kill her?' she thought; he looked wicked enough. Luckily for Lady Mayfield, Fletcher had no deadly weapon handy, or her life would not have been worth a minute's purchase. He caught her by the wrist, and gripped her until his nails cut the white tender flesh.

'Will you get me the money?' he said. 'If you do not I will tear your diamonds from your throat. I have the strength of a devil to-night. I will throttle you where you stand. Do you hear me?'

'Yes,' she said faintly, 'give me time to think. I will try and see what I can do for you. Five thousand pounds, you say; it is a large sum.'

Lady Mayfield had caught sight of the lamps of a carriage, and she fancied it was Lord Mayfield. She parleyed with Fletcher to gain time.

'Five thousand is little enough to you,' said Fletcher. 'Get it me by to-morrow at noon. If you do not promise I will kill you now, and then kill your husband afterwards.' He still had hold of Lady Mayfield's wrist, and she felt his hot, heavy breath on her cheek.

'Kill her husband!'

The words sounded terrible. She would risk her life for her husband. At all hazards he must be saved. She never doubted that Fletcher would carry out his threat. She knew the man too well.

'I will try and get it for you,' she murmured.

'That's more like it,' he said.

Then Fletcher happened to catch her eyes looking anxiously through the shrubs. He looked in the same direction and saw the lights of a carriage. Lord Mayfield was returning. He had no time to lose.

'Do you promise?' he said.

'No, you villain,' said Lady Mayfield.

The return of Lord Mayfield had given her renewed courage.

Fletcher turned upon her like a tiger. In another moment he would have had his hands round her slender throat, when Lady Mayfield uttered such a shrill, unearthly scream, it frightened him. His nerves were unstrung, and the sudden cry in the still night seemed to terrify him. He heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and knew all was lost. He snatched at the diamond at her throat, but she was too quick for him, and it fell upon the ground.

'Curse you,' he said. 'You shall pay for this. You have signed the death-warrant of yourself and husband. He'll never see another day. I'll kill him, and you too.'

Fletcher hurried away, and scaling the wall at the bottom of the grounds, made his escape back to the great city.

Lady Mayfield sank fainting to the ground, where she was found by Lord Mayfield and Marston. She was carried tenderly into the house, and Edith Kingdon waited upon her like a loving sister.

Lord Mayfield heard the tale she had to tell that night. He saw the cruel marks upon her wrist, and his passion against Fletcher was almost beyond his control. As to the threats made by that scoundrel, he never considered them worth thinking about. He quieted Lady Mayfield as well as he was able, but her fears for his safety were aroused, and she vowed she should never rest until Fletcher was safely captured and in the hands of the police. Lord Mayfield promised Smirk should be given instructions to take him in the morning, and this quieted her somewhat.

'Remember, it is our race ball to-morrow, Daisy, and I want you to look at your best.'

'I will try,' she said, with a smile.

Fletcher reached Melbourne safely. He brooded over his unsuccessful mission. His last chance was gone. There was nothing left for him but revenge.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FLETCHER'S REVENGE.

Lady Mayfield recovered from the effects of her interview sooner than was expected. Next morning she appeared much as usual, but her eyes followed her husband with a wistful, yearning, loving look. What her thoughts were she kept to herself; but it was evident she had something on her mind.

The settling at the club passed off satisfactorily for the Caloola party, and all their wagers were paid with one exception. Messrs. Isaacs and Moss had to ask for time, which was granted them, although they did not deserve it. They could not lay hands on Fletcher, and as might have been expected, the 'Spider's' accounts were unpaid. Many bookmakers wrote them off, knowing it was hopeless to think of a settlement now Caloola had won.

Great preparations had been made at Ravenswood for Lord Mayfield's race ball. Two hundred invitations had been issued, and the *élite* of Melbourne were expected to be present. It would be a night of triumph for Lady Mayfield. She was a peeress of England. She had married the head of a noble house. Her husband's pedigree dated back to the Norman Conquest, and the proudest lady in Melbourne would have been glad to occupy her place.

Lady Mayfield sat thinking over the scene of the past night. She meditated for some time, and then the thought struck her she would go to the shrubbery and once more look at the place where Fletcher had so cruelly threatened her.

She went there, and the first object she saw was the diamond broach. She picked it up, and pinned it at her throat. Then she sat down and rehearsed the scene once more. Fletcher's threat still rang in her ears. Would he carry it out? He was quite capable of doing it. She cared not for herself, but for her husband. Her thoughts became very loving as all Lord Mayfield's kindness came before her. How good, noble, and generous he was! Who was she that he should honour her thus? Her past life had been one of tarnished reputation, and yet he loved her. That was the most blessed thought of all. And how she loved him! No woman on earth, she thought, could love her husband as she loved Lord Mayfield. She idolized him. Visions of future happiness and dreams of splendour rose before her eyes. She fancied herself in England wandering through the magnificent baronial halls of her husband's ancestral home. She looked from the windows, and as far as her eyes could see lay stretched undulating meadow and pasture land green with verdure and dotted with oaks that the storms of centuries had failed to wither. Such scenes had Lord Mayfield told her of, and said they would enjoy them together in a life of peace and happiness. Then she fancied she was in London, the cynosure of all eyes, at a fashionable reception, the Australian wife of Lord Mayfield. She saw in imagination the splendid carriages, the exquisite toilettes, the proud, haughty ladies, the aristocratic men, the crowds of retainers, the gorgeous ball-room,

and in the midst of all this she saw herself proud, happy, and courted.

'It is too good to be true,' she murmured. 'I feel it will never come to pass.'

A cheery voice, her husband's, said:

'Daisy! what, hidden in the scene of last night's tragedy? What are you thinking about, darling? I have been watching you a good half hour.'

'Playing the spy,' she laughed. 'How could you? I feel quite ashamed of myself.'

'No need to do it. It was such a pretty picture. I wish I had let it remain a little longer,' he said. 'What were you so earnestly thinking about, Daisy?'

'Would you like to know very much?' she said.

'Yes,' he replied, as he sat down at her side.

'I was building castles in the air, which, like most other edifices of that kind, will, I suppose, topple over. I fancied I was in England with you at your dear home you have pictured to me so many times. I thought I was happy, flattered, and courted, and, as your wife, I took my place amongst the proudest in the land. It was all too good to be true. Oh, dearest, I have strange misgivings,' she said. 'I fancy I shall never see your English home, never rule there as your wife.'

'Yes, you will, Daisy, and very well you will do it. Why, you'll drive half the dowagers in the place crazy with your bright, fresh looks. You must banish these fears. Remember, to-night must be one of triumph for you. I shall be proud of your success. You must look your best. Not a woman in the room will compare with you. You will try, darling?' he said.

'Try! What would I not do for you? You shall see to-night that I will not disgrace you. No prouder woman shall enter the ball-room than the wife of Lord Mayfield,' she said.

'Brava! little woman. You've got the style to a T. By Jove, you'll snub some of those forty-ton crushers, I know,' he laughed.

'Have you seen Smirk?' said Lady Mayfield after a pause.

'What, still harping on Fletcher?' he said. 'Well, I have

seen Smirk, and if it will calm your feelings he has gone on the track of that animal and hopes to "nab him in his kennel"—I believe that was the expression he used—before night. He said he knew where he was to be found, and he is armed with a warrant, and also with something more useful in case it comes to a tussle. I hope no harm will come to Smirk, for Fletcher will be dangerous when he is run to earth.'

'I am so glad!' said Lady Mayfield. 'I feel much relieved. I could not have felt at ease to-night had I thought that scoundrel was at liberty.'

'I fancy his liberty will be considerably curtailed when once Smirk gets hold of him,' said Lord Mayfield. 'But let us drop the unpleasant subject. We have pleasanter things to think and talk about.'

Lady Mayfield felt proud as she looked at the ball-room, which had been made as splendid as money and good taste combined could effect. Lord Mayfield had given *carte blanche*. No expense was to be spared. It would be wearisome to describe the thorough transformation the whole house had undergone. As Marston said, it was simply magnificent, and he wound up by saying, 'You have done the thing handsomely, Mayfield. The Caloola ball must be a success in every respect.'

'And all thanks to that good horse and yourself,' said Lord Mayfield.

'Not forgetting Ike,' laughed Marston.

'By no means. We should have been in a pretty mess without Ike,' said Lord Mayfield.

At last the time for the guests to assemble arrived. The most fashionable people in Melbourne were there, and the Governor's presence gave an *éclat* to the proceedings it was impossible to over-estimate. Such an assemblage had rarely been seen in a ball-room in the great Victorian city. The rank of Lord Mayfield, the popularity of Marston, the sensational victory of Caloola, and, more than all, the desire to see how Lady Mayfield—the unknown lady—bore her laurels, had excited the curiosity of fashionable Melbourne.

Lady Mayfield received her guests with a calm dignity that made Lord Mayfield prouder than ever of his wife.

She was perfectly self-possessed, and her manner was lady-like and refined. She was magnificently dressed and looked a peeress to perfection. The title became her. She glanced at Lord Mayfield, and, catching his wandering gaze of admiration, felt her heart beat faster with joy. He was satisfied—what cared she for the rest of the world?

'What a beautiful woman your wife is!' said the kind-hearted Governor to Lord Mayfield, 'I wish Lady —— could have come with me, but she is far from well.'

'It is very kind of you to say so, your Excellency,' said Lord Mayfield. 'I am proud of my wife, and I hope to have the honour of presenting her to Lady —— on some future occasion. I trust she will speedily recover from her indisposition.'

The Governor's remark about Lady Mayfield's beauty had been overheard, and it gave the key-note to the rest of the guests. Lady Mayfield was courted, flattered, and admired as she had never been before, and never dreamt it possible that she could be. And Lord Mayfield was the proudest man in the midst of that gay assembly. Marston and Edith Kingdon had been amazed at Lady Mayfield's social success. Edith Kingdon was a beauty, but of a more retiring disposition. Lady Mayfield's was a brilliant, dazzling beauty, born to conquer and to rule.

'You look splendid, Daisy, and are behaving nobly. How proud I am of my wife to-night!' said Lord Mayfield.

A gentle pressure of the hand and a look that told more than words was all the answer she vouchsafed him.

The ball was a brilliant success, but like all other balls, it had to come to an end. The night had been one long series of triumphs for Lady Mayfield. She had danced with the Governor, and the haughtiest men in Melbourne had sought the favour of placing their names on her card.

As the guests departed, there were nothing but congratulations showered upon herself and Lord Mayfield. Marston and Edith Kingdon too, had come in for their share of good wishes over Caloola's victory. A more popular, refined, and thoroughly enjoyable ball, it was voted on all sides, had never been given. It afforded ample scope for conversation as the guests drove homewards.

The house was cleared of the gay company, with the

exception of some half a dozen guests who remained for the rest of the night. Amongst the number were Marston and Edith Kingdon.

Lady Mayfield did not seem at all tired with the ordeal she had so successfully passed. She looked charming, and Lord Mayfield never loved her so fondly as now, when he had her almost to himself again.

'How well you looked to-night, dear!' said Edith Kingdon to Lady Mayfield. 'You were the belle of your own ball; there can be no mistake about that. There was not a woman in the room to compare with you.'

'Not one?' said Lady Mayfield, with a sly glance.

'Poor me!' laughed Edith. 'Oh, I was quite eclipsed. I never even had a ghost of a chance when you were in sight.'

'I am sure you looked charming, Edith,' said Lady Mayfield.

'Now, don't flatter; Jack says it's not good for me,' said Edith.

'Oh! it's Jack now, is it!' said Lady Mayfield, with a smile.

'Yes, it's Jack from now and for evermore,' laughed Edith.

'What on earth are you ladies doing in that hot stifling room?' said Lord Mayfield. 'Come outside on to the veranda. There's a nice cool breeze from the sea, and it is a beautiful moonlight night.'

Marston and Lord Mayfield were chatting and smoking, and discussing the events of the evening.

Lady Mayfield and Edith came on to the veranda.

'What a magnificent night,' said Lady Mayfield. 'It must be nearly full moon.'

'Quite, I should say,' said Lord Mayfield; 'but we'll let the moon alone for one night, and talk about your triumph, Daisy.'

'Yes, it was indeed a triumph,' said Jack candidly. 'You looked splendid, Lady Mayfield. I don't wish to flatter you, but it's the truth.'

'Thank you, Mr. Marston,' said Lady Mayfield with a curtsey.

'This is nice,' said Lord Mayfield, blowing a cloud of

smoke, which went circling up in a thousand fantastic shapes into the air, 'especially after a good win and a satisfactory settling.'

'Yes, we've had both,' said Jack; 'but I wouldn't go through another Caloola Cup week for a king's ransom.'

'Nor I, either,' said Edith.

'You said you would go home, Marston, if you won the double,' said Lord Mayfield. 'I hope we shall all sail together in the same boat.'

A slight shadow passed across Marston's face. There were many things to be considered before he went back to England.

'Yes, I hope we shall sail together. I long to see the old home again. Lady Mayfield, I am sure you will love old England, more especially when you will have the beautiful home Lord Mayfield can give you. Future triumphs are in store for you. May they all be as brilliant as that of to-night!'

'I shall love old England for my husband's sake,' she said. 'I have often longed to—what's that?' she said in a startled voice; 'I'm sure I heard footsteps. There must be someone in the grounds. There is a rustling sound amongst the leaves too.'

'I hear nothing, dear,' said Edith. 'You have over-exerted yourself. Let us go inside.'

'There's no one about, Daisy,' said Lord Mayfield, as he leaned over the veranda; 'it must have been one of the dogs,' and he whistled, but there was no answering sound.

The party were standing at the far end of the veranda, which was covered with creepers of dense growth, and a beautiful acacia tree helped to shade the place with its graceful boughs.

Lord Mayfield and Marston were leaning with their backs to the veranda rails and facing the dense mass of foliage which concealed the garden from sight. Lady Mayfield and Edith Kingdon were standing a short distance away.

'I'm certain I heard something moving,' said Lady Mayfield to Edith.

'Nonsense, dear. You are tired, and no wonder. Say good-night. Leave the gentlemen to their smoke and come in.'

Lady Mayfield turned, and was about to walk towards

her husband and Marston, when she stopped short, as if rooted to the spot.

Her face blanched white as death, the eyes almost started from her head. Her hands were clasped tight, and she seemed like a marble statue. She glared at the dense mass of foliage in front of the two men. She saw a sight that froze the very marrow in her bones, and caused her heart to almost stop beating. There, in the midst of the green mass of creepers, she saw two glaring, bloodshot eyes. Then she saw the face of—oh, horror! it was Fletcher's—and there was murder, hatred, revenge in every line of it. Then she saw something flash in the moonlight. It was the glittering barrel of a revolver, and Fletcher pointed it direct at her husband. His face assumed the expression of a fiend. She saw his finger on the trigger. In another moment——

Lord Mayfield and Marston stared at her aghast, and Edith started back. No one saw that deadly, murderous face but herself.

With a cry that struck her hearers almost dumb, and which they remembered for months, nay, years afterwards, she uttered two words,

'Fletcher! Husband!'

Then with a sudden bound she threw herself on Lord Mayfield's breast.

Almost at the very instant the sharp crack of a pistol shot rang in the stillness of the night, and a small curl of bluish smoke struggled through the creepers on the far side of the veranda. A dull thud, as a bullet striking some heavy substance, another piercing cry from Lady Mayfield, and then there was a terrible stillness.

Marston was the first to recover.

'Look to your wife, Mayfield, I'll track the assassin,' and he sprang into the bushes, regardless of consequences.

Edith uttered a cry of alarm, but she was soon recalled to her senses by Lord Mayfield, who, in heartrending tones, cried—

'For God's sake, come here, Miss Kingdon! Daisy's shot. Great God! she's dead,' he groaned, as the poor lifeless form hung limp in his arms.

'Oh, it's terrible,' said Edith. 'Here, staunch the wound! quick! quick! Have you a handkerchief?'

Lord Mayfield seemed paralyzed. He was almost as helpless as a child. In a second Edith Kingdon had torn some of the delicate lace from her beautiful ball dress and pressed it to the place where she saw the bright red blood trickling over Lady Mayfield's fair bosom.

They carried her gently inside and laid her on the sofa with tender care.

Marston returned after a fruitless search. Fletcher had got the start of him, and terror of his awful crime lent him wings. He almost flew over the ground, and scaled the wall without a thought of how he lacerated his hands with the spikes.

'For Heaven's sake go for the doctor, Marston! She's dead. Oh, my God! she's dead!' and Lord Mayfield bent over the inanimate form and wept like a child.

There she lay in the beautiful, costly ball-dress that had helped her dazzling beauty to electrify all her guests. The blood trickled slowly, slowly. Her life seemed to be ebbing away with it. She was going with the tide. Edith Kingdon watched her with a face full of anguish.

'Will he never come?' muttered Lord Mayfield, as he clasped the tiny little hands that failed to respond to his gentle pressure.

At last Marston had returned with Dr. ——, a most eminent physician residing close by Lord Mayfield's residence. He had been at the ball that night, and the horror of the situation caused a cold chill even at his professional heart.

'Leave the room, gentlemen. Miss Kingdon, you may remain,' was his peremptory command, as he glanced at Lady Mayfield's prostrate form.

Lord Mayfield submitted to be led away by Marston. He groaned as he went, and seemed ten years older than he did half-an-hour before.

The doctor examined the wound carefully. His face looked grave and serious. He placed his hand upon her heart and felt her pulse. A slight sensation, like the gentle flutter of a feather in a soft evening breeze. There was life, but his face said no hope, and Edith Kingdon saw it.

She was a brave girl. The doctor knew his business. She could stand it better than Lord Mayfield.

He rose from his kneeling posture and looked in Edith's

face. Then he took her hand and pressed it firmly. Tears stood in his eyes. He had seen death hundreds of times, but never in such a form as this.

Lady Mayfield looked more like an angel than a woman. Instinctively they glanced at her—lovely, calm, peaceful; not a movement. A smile on her lips, her sparkling eyes closed, a slight flush on her cheeks. She might have been sleeping as gently as a child.

'Miss Kingdon, this is very sad,' said the doctor in a low voice. 'It is terrible. I will not ask how it happened. She may recover consciousness, but she has not half an hour to live.'

The tears fell fast down Edith Kingdon's face. She knelt beside the poor, wounded, blood-stained form in all its ball-room splendour. She kissed the sweet face, and laid her head gently on the bosom. A faint flutter.

'Doctor, her heart beats.'

He nodded.

'She is alive. Thank God!'

'Miss Kingdon, she is bleeding to death internally. It cannot be stopped. She has not half an hour to live,' and he pointed to the door.

She understood him. It was a hard task, but it must be done. Slowly she left the room.

Lord Mayfield held out both hands to greet her, but did not speak.

She looked at his haggard face. Could he bear it? Better the blow now than leave him in suspense.

'Will she live?' he said calmly, oh, so terribly calmly.

'Lord Mayfield, I ——,' and then she stopped.

'Is she dead?' came the same dull, cold, methodical tone.

'No; but——'

At the word 'no,' his face brightened, the 'but' caused it to fall again.

'Tell me the worst.'

'She has not half an hour to live, the doctor says,' and she laid her hand gently on his arm and motioned to Marston.

They led him into the room, and left him there with the doctor and his wife. Who can paint the mortal agony of that man?

There lay the being he loved most on earth. Half an

hour to live! Thirty minutes of existence, and the seconds ticking slowly but surely away. He knelt by her side. He never spoke. He felt as if his heartstrings would break. Think! He could not think. The doctor touched him on the shoulder: 'Lord Mayfield,' he said kindly, 'rouse yourself. There is work before you.'

The last words touched the right cord.

'Yes, doctor; there is work before me, to track her murderer down. Oh! my poor Daisy!'—what a wail of agony and pain.

He stood with folded arms, gazing at the beautiful features which a few short hours before had been full of life and animation.

At last there was a change on her face.

'Bend down,' said the doctor.

Lord Mayfield stooped over her. For one brief instant she opened her eyes. They met his with a deep, passionate glance of never-ending love, a glance that will live in his memory until his dying day. It expressed what she could not say—that she had willingly, freely given her life for him. And he knew it. A noble sacrifice had blotted out a past of folly.

Amply had the poor, erring, and much-sinned against woman atoned for her misdeeds. Is Heaven denied to such as Daisy Mayfield? If it be, there is but little hope for thousands of our fellow creatures.

A whisper. Hush! It is a voice from the edge of the grave. It is a word from the gates of Paradise.

'My love! oh, my love!'

A faint, sweet sound. Sacred. Aye, as long as Heaven and earth exist.

'Daisy.'

It was all he could say, but it nearly broke his heart.

'My husband.'

Hush.

Tick! Tick! Tick!

The beautiful, delicate timepiece was gently moving on. The hand of death was going round.

The doctor turned his head away. He saw the signs of the grim warrior coming to claim his own. He knew it would be a peaceful end.

'Husband, love, meet——meet me there,' and her eyes gazed upwards with a pure, solemn look.

Tick! Tick! Tick!

What terrible, quiet suspense!

A sigh, a smile. Not a movement or shudder, and the soul of Daisy Mayfield went forth to meet its God.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HUNTED DOWN.

THE news of Lady Mayfield's tragic death cast a gloom over the whole of Melbourne. Coming as it did directly after the success of Caloola, and the brilliant triumph of the race ball, the painful contrast appeared even more startling. The manner in which the deed was committed, and the heroic way in which Lady Mayfield had saved her husband's life at the cost of her own, was a theme of universal admiration. The morning papers published special editions giving accounts of the tragic deed, and holding up to admiration the self-sacrificing conduct of Lady Mayfield. The *Evening Herald* contained a faithful portrait of the assassin, Fletcher, and as his features were well known in Melbourne, it was surmised that he would speedily be taken. There was a loud cry for vengeance, and Fletcher's life would not have been worth a moment's purchase, had he fallen into the hands of the unrelenting public.

Bitter, indeed, was the blow to Lord Mayfield, Marston, and Edith Kingdon; and in the hour of their victory came the sadness of their irreparable loss.

Now that she was gone they realized all the goodness that lay hidden in Lady Mayfield's character. They saw how bitterly she had repented for her past follies, how true to her husband she had been. Lord Mayfield was overwhelmed with grief. It would be sacrilege to step into the chamber where his dead wife lay, and describe the agony he suffered. Every slight trinket or favourite jewel he saw reminded him of his loss. The house seemed a living monument of the woman who but a few short hours before had ruled as its mistress. Marston consoled him as a true friend can, but

Edith Kingdon's quiet sympathy did much to soothe his wounded spirit. The funeral was the largest ever known in Melbourne, the coffin being buried in wreaths of choice and valuable flowers.

Ravenswood did, indeed, seem deserted when Lord Mayfield and Marston returned to it.

But the last bitter blow had fallen, and Lord Mayfield roused himself. He had hungered for revenge on the dastardly coward who had robbed him of his wife. Marston encouraged him in this, as he saw it distracted his attention from the more painful scenes through which he had passed.

But what of Smirk? When he first learned the fatal news, he was thunderstruck. He had never anticipated such a tragedy, and he now regretted that he had allowed Fletcher too much liberty. Regrets, were, however, useless. He must be up and doing, else the criminal might escape. He obtained all the information he could from Marston, and then set to work. He was spurred to additional exertion by the knowledge that others were hard on Fletcher's track. He vowed he would take him dead or alive, and single-handed if possible. All Smirk's wits were at work, and he followed the trail like a sleuth-hound. His credit was at stake. He had made one grave mistake, and he felt he must in some way atone for it and hunt his man down.

While Smirk and others are actively engaged in pursuit it may be as well to see what has become of the assassin.

Fletcher, when he accomplished his revenge, fled from the scene as quickly as possible. When the deed was done a horrible fear seemed to take possession of him, and gave additional speed to his limbs. He heard Marston crawl through the bushes after him, and he felt there would be no mercy for him if he was caught. When once in Melbourne he might find a hiding-place until he had thought out some means of escape. He knew a dozen houses where he could hide, but he felt afraid of their occupants when they knew the awful truth. Bad as some of the men were he could rely upon, he knew they would look upon even his crime with horror. Away he sped in the still night. He hardly encountered a single person; but every shadow the moon threw across his path made him shudder. The wind moaned with a soft, piteous cry. He

fancied he heard a shriek, a faint, unearthly cry, and it sounded just behind him. He dare not glance round. On he ran, panting for breath. The sweat poured from his brow, and yet he felt cold. Moaning around him came the wind. In every breath he felt a terror he could hardly define. Strange voices filled the air, phantoms conjured up by his half-stupefied brain. A long white arm stretched across the path. It looked ghostly in the moonlight. It was merely the branch of a tree; but it made him start aside and run across the road.

Patter, patter, patter!

What could be this dire thing pursuing him? He heard it come nearer and nearer. It was close on him now. He turned to face his assailant with the energy of despair.

It was merely a large stray dog following his footsteps.

With a muttered curse he hurried on. At last he reached the city. Here he felt more relief, and yet he knew that in another hour the hue and cry would be raised after him. Where should he go?

Off Bourke Street there is a narrow entry leading to an almost deserted thoroughfare, and there are what to all appearance seem tea-warehouses on each side of the causeway. These places are mostly tenanted by Chinamen, whose daily occupation is to keep a 'bank' for the benefit of their gambling customers. Opium-smoking and choice amusements of a Chinese nature are also carried on here. In one of these so-called warehouses resided a man whom Fletcher had known in days gone by, and whom, strange to say, the 'Spider' had done a good turn to—in fact, gave him enough money to start a business in which he had acquired considerable wealth. This man was a half-bred Chinese, his father being an Englishman and his mother a denizen of the Flowery Land. His warehouse was at the far end of this thoroughfare, to which I have alluded, and it was several stories high.

Fletcher took a cautious look around, as he turned sharp out of Bourke Street up the alley way. It was early morning, and there were very few people astir. No notice was taken of the gliding figure by the few Chinamen who sat outside soddened with the fumes of opium. Fletcher knocked at the warehouse door, above which appeared the

name of Jack Harper, more familiarly known as Canton Jack.

After waiting several minutes the door was opened by a Chinaman, and Fletcher stepped in. In answer to his inquiry for the boss, Canton Jack came out from a small back room.

A hurried conversation took place between them, the upshot of which appeared to be that Canton Jack decided to give Fletcher refuge.

'You'll be safe enough where I'll put you for a couple of days,' said Canton Jack; 'but the police are bound to search here in time. What have you been up to now?'

Fletcher's communication seemed to stagger even Canton Jack. He looked hard at the 'Spider' and hesitated.

'You did me a good turn once, "Spider,"' he said, 'but this is horrible. I must hide you for a time, but make up your mind where to go as quickly as possible.'

He conducted the 'Spider' up three flights of stairs, and then by means of a ladder to a small attic next the roof.

'If it comes to the worst,' said the man, 'you must get through this hole and bolt along the roofs. They are all near together, and there's no danger if you keep your hand steady.'

'But where can I get down?' said Fletcher.

'Come, and I'll show you.'

They scrambled through the hole, and Canton Jack led Fletcher along the roofs. When they reached the third house, Flelcher saw a rope ladder securely fixed into the roof with iron clinches. It was long, and could reach the roof of a house much lower down. The ladder was lowered, and the roof below reached. When once on it, Fletcher saw another hole through which it would be easy to slip. This house was untenanted, and used as a store-room by Canton Jack. The ladder and the house could not be seen from the alley way or any street.

'This will do,' said Fletcher. 'Now let's get back, and give me some brandy; I'm nearly dead.'

'You're better without drink if you have to get out that way,' said Canton Jack.

'Never fear me. Give me what I ask for and I'll see you right.'

The small room was quickly reached; the ladder was drawn up, and all seemed secure.

Canton Jack disappeared from view, and presently returned with half a bottle of brandy and some food.

Fletcher took a pull at the brandy, and this seemed to give him fresh courage. When left to himself he began to plan some means of escape. If he could get on board a steamer! No, that would not do. He knew every loop-hole of escape that way would be watched. 'I must get up country somehow,' he muttered.

'Curse it! what's that?' Only a rat scampering over the room; but it was quite enough to startle him.

'I wish I'd killed him,' was his impious thought. 'I did not mean to hurt her. She must be dead. What a horrible shriek she gave! It rings in my ears yet. That fiend Smirk will be on the track. He's the only man I fear. He's the courage of a lion. Those cool men always have. He'll never track me here. Ha! ha! ha! I'm within a stone's-throw of the heart of the city,' he laughed.

He examined his revolver, and found five chambers were loaded. He put it on the table, and then lay down on an old rug to try to sleep. There was no sleep for 'Spider' Fletcher. His thoughts were too active. He got up again and emptied the bottle of brandy, and then, throwing himself down, the spirit overpowered him till he slept heavily.

Meanwhile Smirk was at work. He was baffled so far. It was the day after Lady Mayfield's funeral, and he had not found Fletcher yet. The police were at fault, and the papers were crying aloud for the apprehension of the murderer.

Lord Mayfield had offered £1,000 reward for Fletcher, dead or alive; and Smirk was determined to receive it or perish in the attempt.

'If we meet, one of us must die, if he does not give in,' said Smirk to Marston.

It was the afternoon of Thursday, and Smirk was strolling down Bourke Street in deep thought. Suddenly he stumbled against a ragged-looking dog, sitting at the end of an alley way. There was nothing peculiar in this. But Smirk had remarked this dog here on more than one occasion during

the last two or three days, and at three different times he had run up against him.

'Darn the dog!' said Smirk. 'There's something queer about that. I've been stopped at this corner three times by the brute. Well, I'm blessed!'

The last expression was caused by Smirk looking up the small passage and fancying he had never been there before.

'I'll go up. Looks a deuced queer place. Suppose it leads to the back of the hotel,' he mused.

Smirk went up the passage. What he saw did not impress him very favourably.

'I wonder they allow these Chinese gambling-dens in the heart of the city,' he thought.

Was it luck, or what was it? It is impossible to say. But that same shabby dog was sitting right in Canton Jack's doorway when Smirk came opposite to it.

Now, he had never seen the dog going up the passage, and he wondered how he had got there.

Had Smirk known it was the same dog that had followed Fletcher down St. Kilda Road he would have hugged the animal.

'I'll try what's in here,' said Smirk. He opened the door and passed in. Several men were leaning on the counter. Each of these men had a small brush in his hand, which he occasionally dipped into a saucer filled with a kind of thick black ink or paint. With this they marked out certain Chinese hieroglyphics on a piece of thin paper. These men were gambling at 'bank,' and the game was a novel one to Smirk.

He watched the men with some interest. Scores of them came in, put down sixpence or a shilling, as the case might be, dabbed off five or ten marks, and then went out. They took one paper, and Canton Jack kept another one with similar marks on.

'Rum game, that!' said Smirk.

'Yes. It's all fair, though. Will you try your luck?' said Canton Jack.

'Don't mind if I do,' said Smirk, and he put down a shilling.

Canton Jack crossed off some marks for him, and handed him a couple of papers 'Bank declared at 8 p.m.,' he said.

What possessed Smirk to sit down and watch this game at 'bank' he could never tell. In after-years he related it as one amongst the many wonderful instances of his life in which a just Providence had assisted him in his work.

How long Smirk sat there he did not know, but as it was getting dusk he was about to go, when he heard a voice that nearly made his heart jump into his mouth.

'Bring some more brandy, you d——d scoundrel. Curse you! I'll kill you if you don't,' said the voice.

There was the sound of a fall, and in another minute a Chinaman came rushing in.

'He killee me, Jack; he killee me. Me welly sore. Kickee me over stair. Moree brandee.'

'Hang the fool!' said Canton Jack; 'he'll have to clear out. He's been here long enough. Here, hallo! What do you want there?'

This was to Smirk, who had made a dart at the door and was going upstairs.

Canton Jack ran after him, but Smirk, facing round, flashed a revolver full in his face.

'Make a noise or follow me, and you're a goner,' said Smirk. 'I want the owner of that voice, and, d——n him, I'll have him if he don't kill me.'

Canton Jack saw it all in a minute. As Smirk turned to go up the stairs again he blew a shrill whistle.

Smirk knew it meant a warning, and, leaving Canton Jack below, flew up the stairs two or three at a time, with the revolver in his hand.

Fletcher had heard the whistle, and it came as a sudden shock. He knew he must be up and doing. He heard the footstep on the stairs. He looked through a crevice in the trap at the top of the ladder leading to his hiding-place. He saw the dreaded form of Smirk. A moment's thought, and, quick as a flash, he had hold of his pistol. He pushed up the trap, and saw Smirk at the foot of the ladder.

'Now, you dog, I've got you!' said the detective, as he recognised him. He made a slip as he stepped on to the ladder, and just at that instant Fletcher fired. Had Smirk not slipped he would have been a dead man. As it was, the bullet hit his hat.

Fletcher saw him slip, and fancied he must have been hit. He did not know how many might be within call of Smirk, so he hastily got on the roof and made for the rope ladder.

Smirk was up quickly, the revolver in his hand. He climbed up the ladder and found the attic empty. Then he saw the hole in the roof, and got through, when he saw Fletcher sneaking away, and was after him like a cat.

The 'Spider' heard the sound, and he recognised his pursuer with terror. He had been drinking heavily, and his hand was not firm. He turned like a stag at bay and deliberately aimed at Smirk. Again he missed him.

On came the detective without the slightest fear or pause. When Fletcher saw him coming he aimed again, and this time Smirk felt a sharp sting on his shoulder. He raised his hand and fired, and Fletcher's revolver fell from his grasp. The shot had evidently either hit the raised revolver or Fletcher's hand. This was Smirk's opportunity. With a bound he threw himself on his opponent and grappled with him, and in doing so his revolver also fell down.

He clutched Fletcher by the throat. The men glared in each other's faces for an instant, and neither spoke. They knew it was a struggle for life. The place where they stood was dangerously near the edge of the roof, which slanted a little and made the foothold uncertain.

Fletcher grasped Smirk round the waist and tried to trip him up. Nearer and nearer they drew to the edge. It was a moment of fearful suspense. At last Smirk with a great effort thrust Fletcher backwards. Over and over he went until his hands almost relaxed their hold. Then Smirk slipped, and Fletcher, who was down on his knees, got him round the legs and he fell backwards. Both men were up again, and this time Smirk, with both hands free, dealt Fletcher a terrible blow between the eyes.

A horrible shriek; a man on the edge of the roof with his arms thrown up in the air; a fall backwards, a fearful crash, and 'Spider' Fletcher fell on to the roof below!

Smirk got up, and, grasping hold of the rope ladder, quickly commenced to descend. He had not reached the bottom when the ladder was cut from the top, and he came down with a crash. Luckily he had not far to fall, and he

was not much hurt. He looked around and saw the 'Spider' lying on his back on the roof.

Fletcher was not dead, and as Smirk looked at him he gave him a glance full of hatred.

'I have you now, you murderer!' said Smirk.

'I've cheated you,' groaned Fletcher. 'I am a dead un. You'll never lag me alive, you cur!'

'Dead or alive, it's all the same. You'll never do any more mischief.'

Smirk raised Fletcher's head, and he fancied his back was broken.

He left Fletcher in the position he found him in, knowing that he could not escape, and got down into the room below. He then went for assistance.

A crowd had congregated in the street, and the rumour had spread like wildfire that Fletcher was captured at last.

When Smirk made his appearance there were several constables on the scene, and after he had briefly explained matters they went back with him.

They climbed on to the roof where Fletcher had fallen, and found the body there. But 'Spider' Fletcher was beyond the reach of human justice. He was dead, and could commit no more crimes.

'As well so,' muttered Smirk, as he looked at him. 'He might have said some very unpleasant things in court and tried to defame that poor woman's name.'

Fletcher's body was taken to the morgue to await an inquest.

When the truth of the apprehension of Fletcher was made known, Smirk became the hero of the hour. The desperate struggle on the roof was fully described, and Smirk's hair-breadth escape was a nine days' wonder.

There was some disappointment manifested that Fletcher had not been taken alive, but the chief actors in the drama were satisfied that it was better he should have been killed, and thus got rid of without a trial.

CHAPTER XXXV.

NEWS FROM HOME.

SMIRK received hearty congratulations on all sides for his daring capture of Fletcher. He was the hero of the hour, and one enterprising showman had even gone so far as to offer him £50 a week if he would allow himself to be exhibited among his numerous and varied attractions. Smirk would have proved a big draw, but he declined the offer indignantly, and considered he had been most grossly insulted. Lord Mayfield handed Smirk a check for £1,000, and Marston supplemented it with a hundred more.

It was now January, and the Caloola party, as they may be called, were all safely located once more at Hawk's Nest, and right glad were they to leave Melbourne, where such triumphant and tragic scenes had taken place. On their arrival at Randwick it was found that the lad Willie had quite recovered his reason, and there could be no doubt, from his explanation of what occurred the night Edith Kingdon saw a ghost, that Fletcher was the man who nearly did for Caloola, Willie, and the whole party generally. Wells, too, had got over his dosing, but it was a very sore point with him that he had not ridden Caloola to victory in the Cup.

Lord Mayfield still felt his loss severely, but the first bitterness of the blow had passed away, although it had left a deep scar that time alone could heal.

The wily Smirk, as soon as he had settled with Fletcher, had cabled to Squire Drayton that he had found Marston (the Squire's son) and Ike Thurton. He had received a reply to the effect that he was to bring his captives home at once. Smirk cabled back that he would do so as soon as possible. He had said nothing of this to Marston, and decided to remain quiet. He called at the Post Office one morning for any letters there might be for him, and found one in the Squire's handwriting. He opened it. The note was laconic :

'Dear Smirk,' it ran, 'you have done well. You shall have a hearty welcome to Drayton. Give the enclosed to Jack. Mohican is first-rate.'

Smirk could hardly forbear smiling, although he would have liked a little more explanation as to what the contents of Marston's letter were. However, he must make the best of it now, and give the letter to its lawful owner, with some kind of an explanation on his own account.

Smirk went to Hawk's Nest and found Marston, as luck would have it, alone in Kingdon's sanctum.

He at once plunged into the business he had in hand.

'Mr. Marston, I have deceived you,' he commenced.

'Indeed, Smirk,' said Jack, with a smile.

'Yes, it is the painful truth. I cabled to your father that I had found you both directly I had done for Fletcher.'

'The deuce you did!' said Jack; and Smirk, who had expected an explosion, was surprised to see him take it so coolly.

Smirk went on with his explanation, and wound up by saying:

'I have this morning received a letter from the Squire, and——'

'Where is it? Let me see it,' said Jack excitedly. 'Oh for a sight of dear old dad's handwriting!'

'Here it is,' said Smirk, as he handed the Squire's note to his son.

'John Drayton, Esq.'

When Marston saw the familiar name in the old familiar hand he loved so well, he looked at it intently for several minutes, his countenance betraying signs of deep emotion.

Smirk was a keen observer, and saw he was not wanted. He went out of the room, and Marston never missed him, so earnest was his contemplation of the missive.

At last he opened it. He tore the envelope gently; he handled it reverently. News from home! Who does not welcome it? After years of absence what a thrill the sight of some familiar handwriting creates! The old Squire's letter was long and closely written. Jack perused the contents with a varied and oft-changing expression of countenance. This is what he read:

'DRAYTON HALL, DERBYSHIRE,
'*December 2nd*, 18—.

'My long-lost but none the less beloved boy' ('Dear old father!' said Jack, and he kissed the letter), 'I feel I

have found you once more. Come back, Jack, to your old father and your fond mother, and be locked in their embrace. Your sister joins in the supplication. Can you withstand it longer, my noble, ill-used lad? I know all, Jack' (a sigh of relief from Marston). 'Your brother is no more. He died a repentant sinner, and confessed his base treachery to me before he expired. Had he not been on his death-bed, I could have struck him down to my feet for the stain he had put upon our hitherto unsullied name. The Draytons have never been disgraced before. But I will not malign the dead. He caught a severe chill after hunting, which brought on rheumatic fever. In his delirium I heard enough to prepare me for what was to follow. When he became conscious he told me all. Oh, my poor Jack! How my heart bled for you! What you must have suffered! And all to save the honour of our name and shield a brother's treachery. To think he should shoot you down and leave you for dead! I know not the after-tale, but fancy good faithful Ike must have saved your life. Tell him for me the old post awaits him at home. I want my old trainer back once more. Roberts is an ass. He does not understand the horses. The sooner Ike comes back the better. Pardon the outburst of feeling, my boy. I can't control myself when I speak of that confounded man. I've no one to look after my papers. Here's my dratted lawyer just come in. I believe he thinks I'm mad. I told him to go back home and take his musty papers to his iniquitous den. Said I was writing to my son. 'Pon my word, I think he fancied I was gone. Probably I did act as a lunatic: not the first time, either. But to resume. I sent for that bigoted old idiot St. Clair as soon as Fred confessed his villainy. He declined to come. The old curmudgeon thought it a hoax. Said he'd see me —— first' (Jack smiled. The way the letter was written was so characteristic of the Squire's impetuous, hearty manner that his son almost fancied he could hear him speaking).

'I had to go myself and fetch him. He actually dared to refuse to see me. The blood of forty Draytons was in me at this. I kicked—don't laugh, boy!—I literally kicked the stupid butler on one side. A stormy scene ensued when I met St. Clair, but I dragged him off in triumph.

When he heard poor Fred groan and piteously ask his pardon, the old fellow fairly broke down. He cried like a child. D—— him, he made me cry, sir. We wept like two old fools. We're better friends than ever now. What idiots we have been, never to speak for five years! St. Clair said he could never forgive himself for thinking you were the cause of all his trouble. He asked me to send his deep regret and his most ample apologies. He said a lot more rubbish which I must omit, or you will think the old man in his dotage. Begad, sir, he's five years younger than myself, now I think of it.

'Your dear mother—Heaven bless her, Jack!—never doubted you, and Rose, our pretty Rose, has prayed for you every hour of the day, I believe.' ('Heaven bless them!' said Jack.) 'And now that the lost one is found he must return at one. Smirk is, I verily believe, a mass of ingenuity and detective sagacity. He shall be rewarded for his trouble. I didn't like him on first appearances. He's an acquired taste, but, by Jove! he's all there. Smirk shall be an honoured guest at Drayton. And old Ike must return. And bring all your friends with you, my lad. Charter a ship, buy a steamer, do anything in reason, but for goodness' sake come back to civilization and your doting parents. Recollect, I have only you now, Jack. Your place is beside your old dad in his declining years. Don't be alarmed: I feel good for another half-score yet. I can hunt, Jack, and I can ride in the first flight so far. Mohican is a beauty. You don't know him; Ike does. Come over, and I'll introduce you to the winner of next year's Derby. You must see that run, Jack. Some good yearlings in the paddocks, and if Roberts does not drive them all mad as well as myself we shall have some good racers. Your dear mother and Rosie send more love than I can cram on to paper. Have you found her yet, Jack? Is she good-looking and well bred? If she's your choice she'll do. Bring her home too. If she is an Australian it can't be helped. Great Scott! I never thought of it: she's not dark-skinned, is she?'

A roar of laughter from Jack Marston fairly made the room ring again. 'Dear old Squire! By Jove! won't Edith smile? Not dark-skinned. Oh, Lord! well, I fancy Edith will surprise him.'

Jack continued the letter:

'I can put up with a good deal, my boy, but no half caste please. Your old father is hale and hearty for sixty-five summers, and is eager to welcome you back. You have acted nobly, Jack, and you will reap the reward. Adieu, my boy; your loving father awaits your arrival.

'DRAYTON.

'Cable when you sail.'

'That's the Squire all over,' said Jack. 'Was there ever such a father? What's to be done? We must all pack up and go home. Let me see, there's Caloola to take. Who'll be of the party? I must get Kingdon, and then Edith can come, and we can be married in the dear old church at home. Mayfield will go. Then there's Ike, Wells, if he'll come, and Willie. I must read the Squire's letter to the assembled multitude. At least, a part of it. Poor Fred! He's paid the penalty of his folly. Well, I forgive him; but he once did me a great wrong. I'll show that part of the letter to Edith and Ike. She will know what it means, and faithful Ike will be mad with joy.'

That night there were assembled in Kingdon's drawing-room the host himself, and Edith Marston, Lord Mayfield, Ike, and Smirk.

Marston read most of the letter to them. Ike was hardly master of himself when the Squire referred to him so kindly, and they were all highly amused at the reference to Smirk. But when Edith was alluded to as a dark-skinned beauty the laughter was irresistible, and Edith joined in it as heartily as anyone.

'Now what's to be done?' said Marston as he finished reading.

Dead silence followed the Squire's letter. Those present were all in deep thought. At last Smirk spoke.

'We must go home, at all events, Mr. Marston,' said Smirk. 'I have a duty to fulfil. I have captured the two men I came to Australia in search of, and they must return in my charge to be delivered safely to Squire Drayton.'

'All right, Smirk,' laughed Jack; 'I shall have a nice tale to tell the Squire when I do reach home. I wonder what he will say when he hears of your exploits out here, and

how long you kept him in the dark. I should not like to be in your shoes, I can tell you.'

'I trust, Mr. Marston,' said Smirk with ludicrous gravity, 'that you will refrain from casting aspersions on my character. I kept silence at your request.'

'It all depends how you behave,' said Jack.

The affair was earnestly talked over that night, and it was finally settled that early in February a start should be made for England.

Kingdon had agreed to accompany Lord Mayfield, Marston, and Ike, and Edith was of course nothing loath to fall in with the plan. At Ike's earnest suggestion it was decided to ask Wells to go with them, and Marston felt sure the jockey would accept. Caloola was, of course, to be taken home, and Lord Mayfield said he would like to take a good horse and two or three well-bred yearlings with him, 'just to show what sort of cattle they had out here.'

'It's Hobartville sale, this month,' said Jack. 'We'll run up and see whether we can pick up a decent youngster or two. They turn out some good ones there, and I hear they are a fine lot this year.'

'That will suit me exactly,' said Lord Mayfield. 'Ike had better come too, and then we can't make any mistake.' And so it came about that in the space of a few short weeks the Kingdon party had decided to change their quarters in Sydney for the old land.

'How do you like the prospect, Edith?' said Marston, as they sat on the lawn enjoying the cool evening breeze that wafted across from the sea.

'Oh, so much, Jack. You know I could go with you anywhere, and it was so good to press father to come. I am rather frightened at the prospect of meeting the Squire, though. He must be such a proud aristocrat, and of course will expect his only son to make a great match.'

'You need have no fears on that account,' said Jack. 'My father is a good old country squire. He is impetuous, but one of the most warm-hearted and generous of men. He will welcome you to Drayton as my affianced wife, for I shall write and tell him all particulars at once, and when we start. Rose, dear little Rose, she will be a sweet sister to you, Edith. And my mother will find in you a second

daughter. Your father will be welcomed for my sake as well as for his own.'

'I hope I shall do you credit, Jack. Remember, before it is too late, I am only a bookmaker's daughter,' she said, with a sigh.

'You are my affianced wife, Edith, and your father is a just and honourable man. I shall never regret the choice I have made. I shall be prouder of my wife than if I had married the richest heiress in the land.'

'Do you love me so very much, Jack?' she said.

He looked her straight in the eyes as he said, 'Better, I believe, than man ever loved before. I could not live without you, Edith. Do you not trust and believe me?'

'I do,' she said slowly, and gave him her hand. It was a simple gesture, but it told Marston how deeply he was loved in return.

'I am all impatience to sail for home now it is settled we shall go,' said Jack. 'How delighted I shall be to see the old place once more! You cannot imagine the feelings, Edith, of returning home after five years' wanderings.

'It must be pleasant, very pleasant, more especially when it is such a home, and such parents as yours, Jack,' she said.

'And shall you not regret leaving Australia, Edith?' he said.

'Certainly I shall. I love this sunny land. I like the people. I love the dear familiar scenes. But all would be blank without you, Jack. I shall feel quite reconciled in England if I have you by my side.'

'Dearest Edith,' he said, 'I will repay you for all your sacrifice for my sake. A husband's love shall make up for the losses you sustain.'

They sat in the cool, still night for an hour or more and talked over the events of the coming months.

Kingdon joined them, and Lord Mayfield also sauntered up.

'Fancy, if Mohican wins the Derby!' said Jack. 'It would be almost too much good luck. The Squire never won that great race yet, and he's set his heart upon it. I hope we are all there to see it.'

'Yes I hope he'll win it,' said Lord Mayfield sadly.

'I must leave you, gentlemen, for the night,' said Eidth. 'Father, I want to have a talk with you.'

Mutual 'good-nights,' and Mayfield and Marston were left together.

'Jack,' said Lord Mayfield, 'I can see her to-night as plainly as when I first clasped her in my arms. Is it true, old friend? Can it be true? Jack, do you believe in a hereafter?'

'Yes,' said Marston solemnly.

'She's there, Jack,' said Lord Mayfield, pointing to the starry sky. 'I wonder whether she can see me here. I wonder whether she knows the agony I have suffered. If ever I am tempted to forget her, I wonder whether she would forgive.'

'Mayfield, I believe that poor Daisy would be the first to say to you, could she come back again for an instant, "Don't mourn for me. Be happy in your future life. Let me be a memory of the past. 'Tis better as it is." I don't mean to be harsh, Mayfield. I liked your wife. She was a noble woman, and she ended her life heroically. You, Mayfield, are a peer of England. You must take your place amongst your class and your order. It is your duty to your noble house to perpetuate their name. You are the last of your race. The title must not pass away with you.'

'Perhaps you are right, Jack,' said Lord Mayfield, after a pause. 'But I can never love another woman as I loved Daisy. The thing's impossible. For heaven's sake don't talk about it, Jack; it's sacrilege.'

Marston said nothing, but somehow or other the image of his sister Rose came before him, and he smiled. 'It will suit the Squire,' thought Jack. 'Mayfield,' he said aloud, 'the future is not in our hands. We will leave that to Providence. When once in England, you will plainly see the duty that lies before you. I am afraid I shall lose my friend in the great gay world of London.'

'Never, by Heaven, Jack! You have been my best friend. Come what may, we shall be brothers for the future. On the honour of a Mayfield I swear it.'

Marston knew he meant it, and that the fervid words needed no other response on his part than a hearty grasp of the hand.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

UNDER THE OAKS.

THE annual sale of blood stock at Hobartville, Richmond, has been an important event in the sporting world for many years past. Under the able management of Mr. A. Town (whose recent lamentable death cast a gloom over the whole of the colony) the stud became famous. Many a good youngster has been knocked down under the hammer of Mr. Secretary Clibborn, and the Hobartville breed became proverbial for good blood. Maribyrnong was the backbone of the stud before he died, and such lords of the harem as Le Grand, Segenhoe, Cheviot, Trenton, and Grand Flaneur have mated with well-bred imported mares, and got grand stock in the luxuriant Richmond paddocks. Then there was Childe Harold, the prince of trotting stallions, and Honesty, and the draught stock was not to be despised.

At the invitation of the lord of Hobartville (at the time of which I write the late Mr. A. Town was a hale and hearty gentleman), Lord Mayfield and Jack Marston proceeded to Richmond a couple of days before the yearling sales in order to look at the stock and enjoy the beautiful scenery, and have a chat with the most genial of hosts.

Honour where honour is due, and I must pay my small and insignificant tribute to the memory of the late Mr. Town, whose hospitality I have enjoyed.

Accordingly they took train for Richmond, and were soon whirling along at the usual snail-like rate of the N.S.W. railways.

The train passes through charming country, which increases in loveliness as it nears Richmond. At Windsor can be seen the famous Hawkesbury racecourse, where many a great battle has been fought for the Grand Handicap and Rowley Mile. Windsor is a famous racing place, and some good horses have been trained there. A little further on and Richmond is reached.

A charming country town, Richmond. Very hot this sunny January day, with no breeze to temper the scorching rays of the sun. And yet the ground did not look parched. There was an evidence of abundance on all sides: the

grass so brilliantly green, the trees full of foliage, and affording a cool, luxurious shade; the well-kept roads, the quaint houses, and one particular rustic inn—not the only one in the place by any means, but decidedly an old countrified touch about it — the porch overhung with creepers, the white walls peeping out from a mass of climbing, clinging vines and jasmine. Richmond is a charming place. It looks quiet, contented, and well off. The inhabitants have a self-satisfied air, as if the troubles of the busy world had nothing to do with them. Giant trees abound in the district, and in the town especially they afford nice cool shade.

'Lovely place, this!' said Lord Mayfield, as they looked around after alighting from the train.

'Yes, it is,' said Marston. 'Yonder in the distance you see the Currajong Mountains, and the beautiful Hawkesbury River twines around the foot of the hills. There is some lovely scenery on the river, Mayfield. I wish we had time to see it, but I am afraid it must wait. Well, I think we'll go and see our host.'

They strolled out of the station yard, and were soon at Mr. Town's house—the Squire not residing at Hobartville, but at Richmond, in a nice comfortable domicile near the station.

They received a hearty welcome, as night have been expected. Mr. A. Town was a genial host—a fine, tall, stout man, with a fresh, kind, good face; a picture of a real old English Squire, although born and reared on the estate; a man whom to know was to admire. A chat with him about horses meant hearing the history of the Australian turf. He had tabulated pedigrees of famous racers without number, and it must have been a stupendous task to manage the huge estate of which he had control. And yet the cares seemed to sit lightly on him. He never let any troubles he might have appear on the surface. He chatted and laughed, and his conversation instructed as well as amused all the children. A merry family, well behaved, treating the head with respect and their visitors with no undue familiarity.

The house itself suggested hospitality. Even on the large doormat at the hall entrance the word 'Welcome' was printed, and as Lord Mayfield saw it he said:

'A good sign that. I feel quite at home already.'

'You'll feel more so inside,' said Marston as he knocked.

In a few moments they were heartily greeted by the host. The warmth of his welcome could not be mistaken.

You can often tell what a man is like by the way he shakes hands. The flabby grasp, the weak touch, the don't-care-whether-you-shake-my-hand-or-not sort of feeling is an abomination. The firm, honest, manly grip is what I like, and this is the kind of shake the host gave his guests.

'Welcome to Richmond,' he said. 'Your first visit, I believe, Lord Mayfield? I have had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Marston before. Let me congratulate you both on Caloola's victory. It was well done, and that man Thurton deserves to have a monument erected to his memory even while he is alive.'

'We had a hard fight for it,' said Jack. 'But all came right in the end, and the murderous scoundrel who caused all the trouble is, I am glad to say, out of the way. He'll never trouble anyone more.'

'I read the account in the papers with deep interest,' said the host. 'I must condole with you, my lord. Few words of mine are necessary to tell you how I feel;' and he stretched out his hand, which Lord Mayfield grasped heartily.

'You must be ready for luncheon, gentlemen, so please come this way.' They entered a long room. Low ceiling, but wide, and down the centre ran a long table literally groaning with good things.

'I make no fuss, my lord. We have generally a meal ready for any chance visitors who may drop in to partake of it with us.'

'No fuss,' thought Lord Mayfield. 'It doesn't look like fuss, but it looks like a real country gentleman's table.'

And so it was. There could be no doubt about the hospitality of the Hobartville stud master.

Luncheon discussed, they had a look at the horses in their loose-boxes in the spacious yard at the rear of the house.

They saw the unbeaten Grand Flaneur and the handsome imported Cheviot; the massive Childe Harold, all muscle and none too fat; Le Grand and Sardonyx. Lord Mayfield was surprised at the fine condition of the horses. Not

too fat, but in perfect health. All as clean as good grooming and careful attention could make them. 'Far from the madding crowd,' the heroes of the turf forgot the struggles they had fought, and revelled in the quiet and luxury of stud life. It is a fitting recompense after a career of excitement and hard work. Lord Mayfield admired all he saw.

'Now let me show you an old favourite—the founder of the stud, I might almost call him. Fisherman's blood courses through his veins,' said the host.

A box-door was thrown wide open; an aged horse, looking well, and even handsome, turned smartly round.

It was Maribyrnong, the great sire, the father of many great winners. They looked at the veteran with respect, and he eyed them over calmly, but with a certain proud, self-satisfied air.

'He has got many good uns,' said the host. 'I shall be sorry to lose the old fellow when his time comes. He has been the makings of the stud, I might almost say.'

Next day they had a drive over to Hobartville, and had a glance round the yearling paddocks and the farm.

Hobartville is a lovely place, as many hundreds of colonial sportsmen know. Every year under the famous oaks a crowd of well-known racing men and breeders assemble. Trainers, owners, jockeys, buyers, and pleasure-seekers all gather in the famous drive where the yearlings are disposed of.

As Lord Mayfield and Marston walked through the long rich grass of the paddocks—they were accompanied by the head man—the former said:

'This is the most English-looking place I have seen since I have been in the colonies.'

'Most of the grass is English, my lord,' said the man.

'How luxuriant it is, Marston! No wonder the stock look well here. It's almost knee-deep in some places.'

'Famous place, is it not? How many yearlings are there now?' said Marston to their guide.

'About seventy or eighty, sir, and a fine lot they are. There's one or two real good ones, and I should like you to get hold of one especially, Mr. Marston.'

'Why?' said Jack, rather amused.

''Cause he ought to be in good hands, sir, and the man

who could train and ride Caloola must be worth his weight in gold,' was the reply.

'And so he is,' said Jack, 'and I'll buy the yearling on your recommendation if the figure is not too high.'

'It will not be too high, sir. He's worth a thousand guineas, and he'll not fetch more than half, I expect. Ay, sir, you don't know the expenses of a stud farm like ourn. It's mighty heavy, and the youngsters don't fetch the price they ought to do.'

'I can well believe that,' said Lord Mayfield.

'What's the colt by?' said Marston.

'Maribyrnong—White and Blue,' said the man.

'By Jove, the blood's good on both sides! Let me see, White and Blue's the dam of Tempe, is she not?'

'Yes, sir, and she's a good un, as we all know.'

'We must have a good look at this colt, Mayfield,' said Jack. 'He may turn out another Caloola.'

A shadow passed over Lord Mayfield's face. Unfortunately, Caloola would always be associated in his mind with the saddest scene in his life. It passed away, however, and he said:

'I hope he will be, Marston, if you buy him.'

'Come, and I'll show him to you,' said the man.

They crossed a paddock, and then getting over a high fence, dropped down into what the guide said was 'the pick of the whole estate,' and certainly the enclosure seemed to justify the term applied to it. It was a perfect paddock for young stock, and they could see five beautiful youngsters cropping the delicious herbage. As they approached them the gentry raised their heads and gazed at the visitors. A few moments they eyed them over, and then, with a snort and a frolic, off they went, bounding round the paddock in youthful exuberance of spirit, heels occasionally high in the air—playful attempts to savage each other: at one time the whole five mixed up, a mass of legs and bodies; another time, spread out and lashing at safe distance at each other in high glee. What can be more picturesque than to watch the gambols of thoroughbred yearlings in a good-sized paddock? They have no cares. They have only just been taught that man is their master, and that in such a gentle way that the supremacy is hardly felt. No thought of whip or spur or the diet and

hard training attendant upon their racing career. Away they go. Gallop to your heart's content, my thoroughbred, and think not of the days to come.

'A little closer, sir,' said the man. 'They'll settle down again presently, and I'll show you the pick of the basket. He's a gem. You'll say so when you've looked him over.'

After indulging in another gallop the colts quieted down and let the visitors approach them.

'There he is, sir,' said the man, pointing to a beautiful fully-developed bay colt.

'He's a fine colt,' said Marston, 'and if he's as good as he looks ought to race.'

The son of Maribyrnong was indeed a splendid youngster. No fault could be found with him. Fine intelligent head, a good neck, well set into his shoulders, which sloped slightly; a great girth and round barrel, with beautiful loins and quarters, and a short, firm back. His legs were perfectly clean, and he stood well on them. There could be no doubt about his good looks, and both Marston and Lord Mayfield saw he was out of the common.

Jack made a mental note of the youngster, and determined to have him at a reasonable figure.

They had a good look at most of the yearlings and brood mares, and then went round the dairy farm, for at Hobartville, in addition to the large stud farm, some 250 cows were milked. All the latest appliances for butter-separating, etc., were there, and the gigantic nature of the undertaking could be easily seen.

'No wonder our host has a good deal to occupy his mind,' said Lord Mayfield.

That night they had an interesting talk with Mr. Town over bygone racing days, and he heard the story of Caloola's victory again from Marston's lips.

The day of the sale arrived, and a large concourse of people had gathered under the oaks. A bounteous luncheon had been provided in a huge marquee, and everything was done to enhance the comfort of purchasers.

The auctioneer mounted his rostrum, which stood under a high oak-tree, and made a neat speech, calling particular attention to the merits of the stud.

The company sat round on forms and chairs under the leafy trees, and many well-known faces were to be seen.

Marston and Lord Mayfield were well known, and numerous congratulations were showered upon the former over his big win at the Cup Meeting.

Ike had arrived by the special train, and when he had had a good look at the colt by Maribyrnong he pronounced him quite good enough to buy at a reasonable figure. As might be expected, the news of Ike's arrival had got about, and scores of people were anxious to see the man who rode Caloola to victory. He was an object of general interest, and attracted as much attention as the yearlings offered for safe.

The youngsters, as they were brought into the ring, were eagerly scanned. The first lots did not realize large figures, but as time wore on the bidding became brisk. Lord Mayfield had secured a good colt by Sardonyx for a couple of hundred guineas, and had bid for one or two more. At last the colt by Maribyrnong, White and Blue, came into the ring.

All eyes were at once turned on him, and there was a general stir and murmur amongst the crowd. It was evident there were several buyers for him. He started at a hundred guineas and quickly ran up to four hundred. Then Marston chimed in and bid another fifty. It was at once capped by the offer of a 'monkey' from a well-known owner of horses named Hilton. The bidding still continued, until at seven hundred Marston had the last bid.

'Another pony,' said Hilton.

Marston nodded and again held the lead.

'Eight hundred,' said Hilton, and there was a faint cheer. Cries of 'Bravo, Hilton! You'll get him yet.'

'Don't let him go, Mr. Marston,' said the auctioneer; 'he's the pick of the basket. He'll turn out another Caloola for you.'

The man who had showed the colt to Marston and Lord Mayfield stood at the youngster's head, and he looked hard at Marston, as much as to say, 'Go on.'

'Twenty-five,' said Jack.

'Fifty,' said Hilton.

'Nine hundred,' said Marston.

A cheer greeted the plucky bid.

Hilton looked savage. He was very sweet on the colt,

and evidently did not like being beaten. He sprang another fifty, and said——

'Then I've done.'

'A thousand,' said Marston, and there was a ringing cheer, which made the colt start.

'He's yours, Mr. Marston,' said the auctioneer, as the hammer fell, 'and you've got the gem of the Hobartville stud. He's not dear, either.'

It was the best price a yearling had made under the Oaks, and Marston felt he had done well, although the amount was large.

The sale was over, and the special train conveyed the party back to Sydney. Ike remained behind to see after the two youngsters and bring them down next day. He had a long chat that night with the Hobartville stud-groom, and it was surprising how their ideas coincided. Ike gave an account of his ride on Caloola to an admiring audience specially invited for the occasion.

'I'll tell you what it is, Ike Thurton, I'm right glad Mr. Marston bought that colt. A thousand guineas is a big price, but he's worth every penny of it. I hope he'll win you a big race.'

'I hope so,' said Ike. 'We start for England next month, and he will go with us. I fancy I shall be able to land a Lincolnshire Handicap or a Cambridgeshire with him.'

'Goes home, does he?' said the head man; 'I'm sorry for that. I'd liked to have seen him win a great race in the colonies. It can't be helped, and I hope you'll have luck with him.'

Ike landed the colts safely at Redfern, and next night they were comfortably quartered at Hawk's Nest, in close proximity to Caloola, waiting for the time when they should be shipped for the old land.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ACROSS THE SEAS.

PREPARATIONS for departure were everywhere visible at Hawk's Nest. A voyage from Australia to England is no small matter, although it is much easier than in the olden

days. But when such a voyage means the breaking up of a whole household, and the shipping of three or four thoroughbreds, it becomes an even more difficult matter. Hawk's Nest was almost dismantled. Kingdon had let the house furnished for twelve months. He received an offer to purchase it, but declined, although Marston told him when once he got to the old land he would never want to return. Kingdon was doubtful about this, and said although he should enjoy the trip he would return again at the end of twelve months; and he added sorrowfully, 'I expect I shall have to leave my daughter behind me.'

'You'll have to do that for a certainty,' said Jack, 'so you had better make up your mind to stop with her, and sell the old place right out.'

Boxes had been fitted up on the *Austral* for Caloola and the two colts, and berths had been duly secured for the party.

Ike, with his usual modesty, was for going third-class with the boy, Willie, but, as Marston said, he had £20,000 to his back now, and must take his place in the saloon with them. Ike couldn't see it at all, but his berth being booked, he had to put up with it, although he vowed he'd live with the horses most of the time.

'You see, coming out, sir, I had it all to myself, but it would hardly look the thing for the old groom to mix with his master's party.'

'Nonsense,' said Jack; 'if it hadn't been for you, Ike, there'd have been no trip home at all.'

Before their departure, a banquet was given in honour of Marston, who was popular with all classes, and the gathering, so the papers said, 'was thoroughly representative.'

At last the day of their departure came. The colts and Caloola had been safely got aboard without much trouble, although the hero of the Cup declined to face the deck until his beloved companion, the shaggy-haired goat, had gone ahead and seen all safe.

The boxes were spacious and well fitted, and everything had been done that money could to make the voyage as pleasant for the horses as possible.

A large crowd had assembled on the wharf to see the huge steamer cast off and start on her voyage. The departure of the mail steamer from Sydney is an interesting

sight, and on this occasion it was particularly so. Cheer after cheer was given as the *Austral* moved away.

Marston and Lord Mayfield waved adieux to their numerous friends, and Kingdon looked sadly at the fast-receding city. Smirk and Ike were delighted to be under way for home once more, and Wells appeared to enjoy the scene immensely. Edith Kingdon looked almost sad. She thought it was perhaps the last time she would ever see Sydney and its beautiful harbour again. She was leaving the land of her birth and going to find a home in bleak, cold, foggy England. But she had Jack with her, and that put fresh courage and heart into her.

Lord Mayfield, too, thought of all he was leaving behind, and of the eventful year he had spent. It seemed almost like a dream, and perhaps, on the whole, he was glad to leave scenes with which so much melancholy had been associated.

The *Austral* passed through the Heads and out to the open sea. She breasted the waves, and left a white serpentine current in her wake.

There is no need to give a description of the voyage home. The *Austral* made a quick passage, and landed all her passengers safely at Plymouth in good time.

Here Marston and party went ashore, leaving Ike, Wells, and Willie to go round the coast with the horses.

A quick run to London, and once they were in the Metropolis of the world, Marston felt as he had never done for the past few years. Lord Mayfield, too, was glad to be at home again. The whole party were to go on straight to Drayton by the early morning mail, and they would arrive at the old Hall about noon.

Edith Kingdon was greatly impressed with the big city, and felt somewhat awed at its vastness, and the immense number of people hurrying to and fro as though their lives depended on it.

They stayed at St. Pancras Hotel for the night, in order to be ready for the train next morning.

'Up with the lark' was Marston, although he'd have had a difficulty in finding one soaring in the sky over murky London towards the latter end of March. He might have discovered a poor half-starved, mopish-looking bird, which its seller designated as a lark, in the vicinity of Whitechapel

or Seven Dials, but a free lark in London would have been a phenomenon.

The Midland express is worthy of the name. It whirls along at terrific speed, and Kingdon vowed he'd never been flying at that rate before. They were a merry party ensconced at one end of a spacious drawing-room car—Marston, Lord Mayfield, Kingdon and his daughter, and Smirk.

'What a change of scene this is!' said Edith. 'And to fancy that at the commencement of last month we were all at Hawk's Nest, looking over dear old Randwick, and trying to keep cool in the shade. It's cold enough now,' she said, as she drew her furs about her.

A keen March wind was blowing, and it made them all feel chilly after the 'sunny South.'

The train whirled on, and Jack described to them familiar objects of interest along the line. The time passed merrily away until they reached Derby, where a halt was made for ten minutes.

How familiar the old place looked! Hardly a bit altered since Jack left it five years or more ago. The very sound of the name on the porters' lips was welcome, and he fancied he recognised more than one official on the platform.

'I wonder whether the express stays at Bakewell,' said Jack. 'That will be our port of debarkation, and I will tell the Squire to have the traps there for this train. I'll just get out and see.'

On inquiry he found the train did not stop there, but when he mentioned to the guard that it was a party for Drayton Hall, the man said the train could pull up for them. He had received instructions from the station-master that he was to do so if the Drayton party were on the train.

'The Squire's son's coming home again, I hear, sir,' said the guard. 'We all thought he was dead. He was a fine fellow, Master Jack.'

'Was he?' said Jack, highly amused. 'How did you know him?'

'Often came down to Derby with us,' said the guard. 'I was on the slow train then.'

'Been promoted, I see,' said Jack.

'Yes, sir,' said the guard.

'Mr. John Drayton is with the party,' said Jack.

'By Jove! I'd like to see him, sir,' said the guard. 'He must be a good deal altered after being buried alive in Australia.'

'Yes, he is altered,' said Jack. 'Don't you think so?' he said, as he laughed at the guard.

'Why, that's Master Jack's laugh!' said the guard. 'I've heard it many a time. Surely you are not Mr. John Drayton?'

'I'm the identical,' said Jack.

'Well, there is a likeness, now I come to look well at you. I'm right glad to see you back, Master Jack, and, my word! won't the Squire be delighted. He's been nearly mad, I hear, since he heard you were found.'

'Dear old dad!' said Jack.

The whistle sounded, and he had just time to reach his car when the train moved off.

'A narrow squeak!' he said; 'the guard was giving me a welcome home, and I nearly missed the train.'

Away they went again through the beautiful Derbyshire scenery, which even in March looked picturesque. They were soon at Bakewell, and there, sure enough, standing at the pretty little station gate, were a couple of dog-carts with two spanking horses attached to them.

'Looks like home, this,' said Jack. 'The Squire's sent us a couple of good turn-outs. He's stayed at home to welcome us in regal style.'

He was leaning out of the window, and was as joyful as a schoolboy returning home for the holidays. The train pulled up, and they were soon on the platform, luggage and all.

Roberts had driven one of the dog-carts to Bakewell, and a new hand, as Jack said, 'tooled' the other horse. Roberts touched his hat respectfully to Jack.

'You know me again, eh, Roberts?'

'Yes, sir,' he said. 'I'm right glad you're home again. The Squire's been mighty hard to please since Ike left.'

'Well, Ike's back again, and he'll be at Drayton in a few days. You'll not be sorry to see him again, I suppose.'

'No, sir. That brute Mohican hates the sight of me, I believe,' said Roberts. 'The Squire said he'd send the drag for your luggage later on, sir.'

'All right,' said Jack. 'Come along, Edith. Tell Roberts

what packages you want, and he'll put them in the dog-cart.'

Edith pointed out what she required, and they were placed in the trap.

Marston handed Edith in and then took the reins.

'Kingdon, you'd better get in the other trap and drive, if you like. You'll find the horse a good one, I'll warrant. Mayfield, you come with us.'

Smirk got into the trap with Kingdon, Roberts and the other man being seated behind.

An admiring circle of porters and a few idlers had assembled to see them off. Real live Australians were a novelty in those parts.

Jack drove the splendid animal rapidly down the road and over the bridge until the famous Rutland Arms was reached, where they halted for a few minutes to regale themselves before their eight-mile drive.

Off again along the clean, smooth white road. Jack pointed out the main points of interest, and Edith was delighted with all she saw. Everything was so new and strange.

'Your father must love this dear land,' said Edith.

'I believe he would die if he was transplanted out of Derbyshire. But wait until you see the old Hall, Edith; it's a grand old place, although I say it. We have lived there for centuries—I mean the Draytons. I expect you will be mistress there some day, Edith,' he said with a fond look.

'I hope I may be worthy of the honour, Jack, if ever I am,' she said. 'Oh, how you must have felt the five years' banishment! Do all the places appear familiar, Jack?'

'Indeed they do. I feel as if it was only a week ago that I drove along here. Look, Edith, there is old Haddon Hall on the left. Isn't it a grand old ruin? That belongs to the Rutlands. I must show it you some day. Chatsworth, the Duke of Devonshire's place, is a few miles from Bakewell. There's a beautiful walk to it over the hill above the station.'

'What a grand old ruin! I've read about such places,' said Edith, 'and they sounded to me like fairyland. Did ancient warriors ever inhabit the old Hall?'

'Yes,' said Jack, 'and you should see the old banqueting hall, and Dorothy Vernon's walk along which she fled with

her lover in the night. Most romantic, I can assure you, Edith. We shall have plenty of time to visit all these places by-and-by. Lord Mayfield has some fine old homes he can show us.'

'Such as they are, you will always be heartily welcome to them,' said Lord Mayfield. 'I shall be delighted to have Mr. and Mrs. John Drayton for my guests.'

Edith blushed, and Jack said: 'Don't you forget that when we do happen to call at one of your baronial halls.'

'It's a bargain,' said Lord Mayfield. 'Mrs. John Drayton shall sleep in the room good Queen Bess once occupied.'

'I should expire with fright,' said Edith. 'I might fancy she would order me to be imprisoned in the Tower or beheaded for daring to desecrate her chamber.'

In the other trap Roberts and Smirk, who appeared to know all about the country, were telling Kingdon to look at so many objects of interest that it took him all his time to drive straight.

As they drew nearer to the Hall, Jack pointed out familiar scenes. He could almost hit the places where he had made good shots at the pheasants or a covey of partridges. The trees seemed familiar, and his heart bounded with joy as he thought how soon he would be once again in that dear old home.

At last! They were driving up a valley, on either side of which were giant hills and rocks, the latter all sorts of fantastic shapes. In the distance they could see smoke curling up into the air from amidst the trees. Nearer and nearer they came. The silvery Dove was wending its way along between the meadows, and now they had reached the paddocks. Another moment and the house burst into view.

Old Drayton Hall looked just the same as it did when Jack left it, and there would be very little change in a century to come. There it stood, nestled in the heart of the valley, with the big mountains towering up in the far distance. An enchanted spot Edith thought it.

'That's the old place, Edith. Welcome to Drayton!' said Jack.

'What a lovely scene!' she said. 'Oh, Jack, I could live here for ever.'

He looked at her fondly and said: 'I'm glad you like your future home, Edith.'

Up the drive they went, lined on either side with massive chestnuts, and then they were near the Hall door. There stood the Squire with his wife and daughter.

How hale and hearty he looked! none the worse for that five years, but a shade anxious and worried.

They were a pretty group, and so Edith thought as she glanced at them. Jack pulled up with a jerk, and was in the Squire's arms in a twinkling. His mother and sister hugged him, and he could not tear himself away. What a home-coming!

'Hearty, my lad,' said the Squire. 'Gad, Jack, you look better than ever. My own lad, God bless you! I'm right glad to see you again and all your friends.'

'This is Miss Kingdon—Edith—my future wife,' he said proudly, after he had assisted her to alight from the dog-cart.

The Squire took her hand and looked at the beautiful face with undisguised admiration. Then he stooped his stately old head and kissed her.

'My son's choice must always be welcome to Drayton,' he said. 'I am proud to see you, Miss Kingdon.'

Rose embraced Edith like a sister, and made her feel at home at once, and motherly Mrs. Drayton held her in her arms and kissed her again and again.

These warm-hearted Derbyshire people touched Edith to the quick. She loved them already.

Kingdon and Lord Mayfield were heartily welcomed.

Smirk was doubtful at first how he should be received, but the Squire shook his stick at him and said: 'Ah, you rascal, a nice trick you've played me! But you are forgiven. Come down out of that seat. D—— it, man, I'm not furious. I'm as calm as a duck-pond. Get down and come inside, and then I shall demand an account of your stewardship.'

Smirk jumped down and followed the party into the house, where a real good old English dinner had been provided for the travellers.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A FIRESIDE CHAT.

THE biting March wind whistled and howled around Drayton Hall. It tried to creep in at every crevice and crack, and when baffled it raged with tenfold more fury at its defeat. It was a regular keen March night, and on the Derbyshire hills the cold was felt with double intensity. Not a pleasant night to be out of doors, but there is always a sense of comfort and satisfaction in hearing the wind and the storm when you are comfortably ensconced in an easy-chair before a good roaring fire.

The Squire's sanctum looked peculiarly cosy on this particular night—Jack's first evening at home after five years' absence in Australia. A roaring wood-fire crackled on the hearth, and sent myriads of sparks at intervals flying up the chimney, to be quickly hurled about by the furious wind outside.

Around the fire sat a merry group. The Squire occupied his old seat, a high armchair, a model of comfort, if not of grace. He looked the picture of contentment, and he smoked his pipe with evident relish. At his feet lay a splendid mastiff, whose ponderous head and heavy black jaws were occasionally raised as he glanced at his master's face with his intelligent brown eyes.

Jack Drayton—for we must drop the Marston now—sat next to his father, and ever and anon looked at the old gentleman with loving eyes.

Lord Mayfield, Kingdon, and Smirk completed the group.

The ladies had retired to the drawing-room, and were making Edith Kingdon quite at home, and already she and Rose had become quite confidential.

The sound of peals of laughter occasionally reached them from the Squire's retreat, which denoted they were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

The Squire was naturally anxious to hear all about Jack's doings in Australia, and his son was equally desirous of ascertaining how matters had gone on at home during his absence.

Jack gave a pretty concise history of his doings in the 'sunny South.' When he related the history of Caloola's

Melbourne Derby and Cup the Squire became quite excited. But when it came to the finishing touch, where Ike took the mount and rode the horse to victory, the Squire jumped out of his chair and gave such a hearty 'hurrah!' that it might have been heard on the lawn.

'Bravo, Ike! By George, sir, it's the best thing I ever heard of! He's a brick. He shall be promoted. He shall have his old place. He shall, he shall; damme, sir, he shall do what the deuce he likes. It's noble. By George, sir, it's noble!' and the Squire, fairly winded, had to give in.

'I thought you'd get a little excited over it, father,' said Jack, with a twinkle in his eye.

If there was one thing the Squire prided himself on, it was that nothing ever excited or ruffled him.

'Not a bit of it. Not excited at all, I assure you. But it was a stirring yarn. By Gad, it was good!' he said.

'I can assure you we were all glad when it was over,' said Lord Mayfield. 'I shall never forget it as long as I live, or the scene that followed,' he added with a sigh.

And then Jack told the Squire of Lady Mayfield's death and Fletcher's treachery, and how Smirk caught the villain at last. When he had finished, Squire Drayton got up, and, crossing over to Lord Mayfield, gave him his hand. He put the other on his shoulder, and looked into his face.

'Mayfield, it must have been a terrible blow. I will not sympathize with you now. You know I feel for you. But it was a noble death. She gave her life for yours. It was an honourable end. Thank God, Mayfield, she died as she did, and not as my son Fred. I will not speak ill of the dead, but you must all know that the late Captain Drayton did his brother a grievous wrong. He made some reparation on his death-bed, but it came very late—very late.'

'Let us drop these painful subjects, Squire,' said Lord Mayfield. 'The past we may never forget, but, still, we must look forward with hope to the future.'

Smirk related some of his experiences, and made the Squire laugh heartily; and Kingdon's reminiscences of the turf and some gigantic gambling transactions were almost beyond belief. And so the evening wore on.

'And when do you expect Ike down?' said the Squire.

'He should be here by the end of the week,' said Jack. 'You'll like Caloola; he's a real beauty, father, and looks none the worse for the voyage. I believe it has done him good. The colts are gems. I gave a thousand for the colt by Maribyrnong.'

'The colt by what?' said the Squire.

Jack laughed.

'By Maribyrnong, a famous sire.'

'What a deuce of a name! He'll never be able to carry a name like that. But the Australian colts will not come up to ours,' said the Squire confidently.

'Won't they!' said Jack. 'You wait and see!'

'I fancy Squire Drayton will find Caloola rather better than he expects,' said Kingdon. 'It will take the best they have got here to beat him if he gets round again.'

'I can hardly believe it,' said the Squire. 'The climate must tell against them, more especially as they have arrived in March. I have something good to show you, Mr. Kingdon. I've got a three-year-old that looks all over a Derby winner. He's the best I ever bred, and I've had some good ones, eh, Jack?'

'That you have,' said Jack. 'I suppose you mean Mohican?'

'How the dickens did you know? Oh, I suppose Ike told you. He had charge of him before he left. Drat it all! he left me in a nice mess. I must have it out with him for that.'

'Ike has got a fortune now, father, so you must be careful how you handle him,' said Jack.

'Fortune will not make much difference to Ike, if I am not mistaken,' he replied. 'He must take charge of Mohican, at all events. I don't care for Roberts, and what's more, the horse can't bear him.'

'I hope you will have the good fortune to win the Derby' said Lord Mayfield.

'It will be the crowning ambition of my life if I do,' said the Squire, 'and I really believe Mohican is good enough.'

'Ike said he was,' replied Jack, 'and I've great faith in him.'

'You must all look him over and give me your unbiased opinion,' said the Squire.

'Well, father, I think we'd better join the ladies,' said Jack.

'Ah! I never thought of that,' said the Squire. 'Young blood, of course, and Edith is your care, Jack. I admire your taste, lad. Kingdon, your daughter reflects credit on her father.'

'She's my only child, Squire, and therefore very dear to me,' replied Kingdon. 'I am very proud of her.'

'And so you ought to be. Come along, Mayfield. I expect Jack will never rest until he gets to the side of his lady-love.'

They found the three ladies quite as comfortable in the drawing-room as they had been in the Squire's den, as he called it.

Edith Kingdon felt at home, and almost loved Mrs. Drayton as a mother, and Rose as a sister, already. She had never known what it was to have a mother's fostering care, and her heart warmed to Mrs. Drayton, who, she instinctively felt, would supply that want.

Jack and Edith after awhile drew a little apart from the others, and Lord Mayfield was relating some of their Australian reminiscences to Mrs. Drayton and Rose, whilst the Squire appeared to be highly entertained with Kingdon and Smirk.

'What a dear, kind lady your mother is, Jack!' said Edith. 'And Rose—I love her already. How beautiful she is! Look at her now.'

Rose Drayton did indeed look charming. Her face was bright with enthusiasm as she heard Lord Mayfield relate Ike's ride in the Cup. She looked at the speaker with her beautiful eyes glistening.

'She's a dear, good girl, Edith. I'm so glad you like mother, but I felt sure you would. And how do you like the Squire?'

'He's a fine man—a splendid man! But I'm a little afraid of him, Jack,' she said.

'Afraid of old dad! Why, he's very harmless,' laughed Jack. 'He makes a good deal of noise occasionally, but he's the best old governor in the world, when you know him.'

'I shall love him in time,' said Edith. 'Has he taken to father?'

'Wonderfully,' said Jack. 'Look at the trio now.' And he smiled as he saw the Squire almost crimson with laughter at one of Kingdon's yarns.

'I'm so glad they get on well. Poor old father, he'll be very lonely in Australia without me,' said Edith.

'If he does go back he'll soon be over here again,' said Jack. 'He will not leave you long, depend upon it, Edith.'

'I hope he will not,' she said.

'Home-sick already,' said Jack. 'I was about to say "name the happy day," Edith.'

'Don't tease, sir. I will not become Mrs. John Drayton at all if you provoke me,' she said, with a smile.

'Won't you, indeed! You can't get out of it. No. I'll have you up for breach of promise,' he said laughingly.

And so the good-humoured chaff went on. It was a joyful night for all of them, and their happiness was reflected in their faces.

At last Mrs. Drayton bid them all good-night, and Edith and Rose followed. Lord Mayfield watched them leave the room, and as Rose's slight, graceful figure disappeared he seemed lost in thought.

Jack watched him, and a curious smile hovered about his face.

'A fiver for your thoughts, Mayfield,' he said in his ear.

Lord Mayfield started.

'You've raised the price, Jack,' he said, with a laugh. 'They are worth considerably more than that, though, on this occasion.'

'You lads will sit up all night,' said the Squire. 'Recollect I'm up with the daylight, but I dare say you will take it out then.'

Kingdon and Smirk followed the Squire, and Jack and Lord Mayfield were left alone.

They sat over the fire for fully an hour, talking over old times, and at last Lord Mayfield said:

'Jack, you may think I'm a queer fellow, but I never thought I could get over my trouble until to-night. Do you know what I mean?'

'I fancy so,' said Jack.

'We're curious mortals, old fellow. I can never forget my dear dead Daisy, Jack; and yet I feel I could live a happy life once more. It would not be fair, Jack. I'm a broken man so far as the heart is concerned. I've only got a second-hand sort of love to offer any woman.'

'Don't say that,' said Jack; 'you're young yet, Mayfield. In years to come the past will be but a memory—a sad recollection.'

'We shall see. Time will tell. Not a word of this, Jack. I must bide my time.'

'I respect you too much, Mayfield, and I know you too well to attempt to feign that I do not understand you. I shall keep silence, and all I can say is, if you do feel that way inclined, I wish you luck.'

'Thanks, Jack,' said Mayfield, and the two men shook hands.

A little scene was enacted as Edith bade Rose good-night at her door.

'I'm sure I shall love you, Edith. I do feel so happy,' said Rose.

'And so am I, Rose. We shall be good sisters, I am sure. Jack is a good fellow, and he deserves to have such a sister as you, Rose.'

'And such a wife as you, Edith,' was the reply.

'How do you like Lord Mayfield?' said Edith.

'He is handsome; I admire him very much. What nice hair he has, and such good eyes! He seems melancholy, rather. Has he had any trouble, Edith?' said Rose.

'Very sad trouble indeed, Rose. He may tell you all about it some day.'

'Tell me! Why should he tell me, Edith?' said Rose.

'Ask your heart, sister mine,' said Edith, as she kissed her.

Rose blushed and hid her fair face on Edith's shoulder.

'I'm so happy,' she murmured; 'I feel quite different to-night.'

'Heaven bless you, Rose! Pleasant dreams, and don't build too many castles in the air. Good-night.'

'What's this? Oh! it is you, Miss Kingdon, is it?'

It was the Squire in his dressing-gown, and he looked like a grand pasha.

'I was bidding Rose good-night, Mr. Drayton,' she said.

'Bless my soul! you must have been an hour over it. Edith, do you love my boy Jack very much?' he said suddenly.

She had her hand on the Squire's arm.

'Love him!' she said; 'I am almost afraid when I think how much I do love him.'

'Good girl!' said the Squire. 'Jack's a fine lad. He'll make a good husband, and you'll make him a good wife. Gad! I never thought I should fancy an Australian girl, but you are—well, I respect his choice.'

'Thank you, Squire,' said Edith, and she saucily added, 'You prefer me to a dark-skinned girl, then, Squire.'

Squire Drayton laughed as he said:

'You be off to bed, miss, and don't poke fun at your father that is to be. There, good-night, my child. You're welcome to Drayton and all that's in it, Jack included,' and he kissed her fondly.

'You dear old man!' said Edith, as she locked her door. 'I'm not a bit afraid of you now. However could I have been afraid of Jack's father?'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ROSE DRAYTON'S CHOICE.

IKE THURTON arrived safely at Drayton with his precious charges, accompanied by Wells and Willie. The Squire made a great fuss over Ike, and although he rated him soundly for his desertion he did it with a twinkle in his eyes, as much as to say that under the circumstances he had done quite right. Ike was at once installed in his old position as stud-groom, and he went back to his cottage-home as if he had only been absent for a few weeks. Roberts was, on the whole, glad to have Ike back again, for now Captain Drayton was dead he had no chance of doing any dirty work, for none would be required of him. As for Wells, the Squire seemed to have taken quite a fancy to him. The jockey had not quite got over his disappointment, for he would dearly have loved to ride Caloola to victory in the Cup. He gnashed his teeth whenever he looked at the horse, and vowed Fletcher would have suffered torture could he have meted out his punishment. When Wells saw Mohican he was much struck with the appearance of the horse, and an idea entered his head which he at once communicated to Ike. The stud-groom looked dubious, and shook his head.

'If we could manage the Squire it would be all right,' he

said, 'but I'm afraid he'll not stand it. Our best plan will be to talk Mr. Jack over to our way of thinking.'

Mohican and Caloola had been placed in boxes next each other, and the latter had, as usual, the Australian goat for his companion. Caloola appeared none the worse for his journey, although he evidently felt the keen winds.

'A pair of beauties,' said the Squire, as he stood contemplating them, and the remark was cordially echoed by Lord Mayfield and Jack, who were with the Squire looking round the stables for the twentieth time.

Kingdon and Smirk had gone up to London, the former to see a little life, and the latter to report himself at Scotland Yard.

Mohican had grown into a splendid animal. He resembled his famous sire Hermit. He was not a big horse, but perfectly shaped in every respect. Ike was proud of him, and thought it would be a great feat if he could train the winners of the Melbourne and English Derbies in twelve months. He had given Mohican a good trial since he had him in hand, and the horse pleased him immensely. Wells was riding him at exercise, and had quite recovered his health. Caloola was soon given gentle exercise, and as the weather cleared, and it became somewhat milder, he improved considerably.

The Squire, although it went somewhat against his old English prejudices, had been compelled to admire Caloola, and he thought the horse would make a great sire.

Lord Mayfield left Drayton for a short time to pay a visit to his various seats, but he had promised to return early in May.

Jack Drayton settled down quite comfortably at home, and the Squire found him a great help. He consulted his son upon all matters of interest, and Jack's opinion was generally worth having.

One night they sat in the Squire's sanctum, when Jack said:

'Father, I think you've got as good a chance of winning the Derby this year as ever you had. Mohican is a real good one, and Ike is remarkably fond of him. Who do you propose shall have the mount?'

'I must engage a crack jockey if possible, but the best are all retained by the patrons of the big stables. I have

no doubt, however, I can get a real good man, more especially when it becomes known what a clinker I have got. At present, as you can see by the state of the market, Mohican is not favourite by any means, although he will be before the day of the race.'

'Let Wells ride the horse,' said Jack.

The Squire stared at his son in blank astonishment. He thought there must be a screw loose somewhere. Wells, indeed! The idea was preposterous.

'Bless my soul, Jack!' he said, when he had recovered from his first surprise. 'What on earth do you mean? Don't imagine because you have lived in Australia a few years that you have better men in the colonies than we have here. Confound it, sir, what would you have? You've an Australian horse; you're going to have an Australian wife, and now, hang it all! you actually want to have an Australian jockey on Mohican in the Derby.'

'That's about the size of it,' said Jack, 'and I don't think you could do better. I know you don't object to Caloola, and as for Edith—why, you're half in love with her yourself. I can assure you Wells is a real crack jockey, and for my own part I should prefer to see him on Mohican to anyone else. He rides with judgment, and, as you know, has a fine seat on a horse. Besides, Ike is in favour of his having the mount, and that goes a good way.'

'You don't mean to tell me,' said the Squire, 'that Ike really admits that Wells should ride Mohican?'

'Certainly he does,' said Jack, 'and a sound piece of advice it is, too, in my opinion.'

'What on earth does Wells know about the Epsom course, and how can he get round Tattenham Corner? No, the thing's impossible, Jack.'

'Of course, if you say so, it is,' said Jack; 'but I would advise you to consider it over seriously. There are as good jockeys in Australia as you will see here, and they have quite as much pluck. You are prejudiced against them, I know, because you imagine they cannot have the necessary experience. But consider what the Australians can do. What about rowing? Look at Beach, Kemp, and those rising young scullers Searle and Stansbury. Then take the cricket-field. What about the Australian Eleven? They can hold their own with the best team you can put into the

field. Some of the best all-round athletes in the world are to be found in Australia, and I can assure you the jockeys are as good as they make them. Take Wells, for example. He has ridden scores of great races, and on all kinds of courses, and I feel sure he will surprise them on the Downs if you let him ride.'

'By Jove, Jack! you argue your case well. Quite a long speech for you, my boy. I must admit that in most matters of sport the Australians are our equals, but not in horse-racing yet.'

'I'm not so sure of that,' said Jack. 'The Australian thoroughbreds are almost, if not quite, equal to the English, and they are improving every year. Fresh blood is constantly imported, and in another ten years you'll find they'll be above us in anything. Take Caloola as a sample. You'll not find many better in England.'

'True,' said the Squire thoughtfully. 'I never expected to see a horse like that.'

'Come, father, let Wells have the mount. I'm sure you will never regret it,' said Jack.

'It requires time to consider,' said the Squire. 'Mohican's chance for the Derby I consider second to none, and we must not lose a single hope of victory.'

The Squire thought a good deal over the chat he had had with his son, and he came to the conclusion that after all it might be as well to let Wells have the mount. He had consulted Ike, and that worthy had urged the claims of Wells in no measured terms.

Somewhat against his will, the Squire at last decided to let Wells have the mount, and the jockey was highly delighted at the prospect of steering an English Derby winner. It would be some recompense for not having a mount on Caloola if he could ride Mohican. The weeks passed quickly away, until at last the 'merrie month of May' came in, bringing with it bright sunny skies and a genial breeze. The fields were clothed in a garment of May flowers, and the birds welcomed the spring with joyous song. It was a glad time for the family once more united at Drayton.

With the opening of May came Lord Mayfield's arrival, and it was quite evident he had come to Drayton with some fixed intention in his mind.

He received a hearty welcome, and Rose Drayton's face brightened visibly as he took her hand, and she fancied he was rather loath to part with it.

'Jack, old boy, it's coming to a climax,' he said one morning as they were strolling through the paddock looking at the colts cantering about.

'What is?' said Jack. 'The Derby's not far off, is it?'

'Oh, the Derby be—well, be dashed,' said Lord Mayfield; 'I'm sick of racing, Jack. I shall never go in for it. I may have a breeding establishment, but that is all.'

'And quite enough too, if it's managed on the most approved lines, regardless of expense,' said Jack. 'Do you want a head man for it? I might have a chance of the job.'

'Stop chaff, Jack; I'm serious,' said Lord Mayfield.

'You look it, sure enough. What's wrong? Had a tooth out, or something else quite as unpleasant?' said Jack.

'You'd provoke a saint, Drayton. Now be serious. The climax is about Rose—I mean Miss Drayton.'

'What about her?' said Jack. 'She's reached a skittish age, I am aware. Rising about twenty three or four, I believe, and not yet broken in.'

Lord Mayfield groaned.

'Will you be sane for one moment, Jack? You know what I mean.'

'Haven't the remotest idea,' said Jack. He knew well enough, but he meant Lord Mayfield to say what he had to say without assistance.

'I believe you like me, Drayton,' said Lord Mayfield. 'We have been good friends, have we not?'

'Yes,' said Jack, 'and always shall be, I hope.'

'I want to be more than a friend, Jack. I want to be your brother. There, man, it's out now.'

'What's out?' said Jack, with an innocent look. 'Didn't we swear we'd be brothers long ago?'

'Don't be so deuced obstinate. I want to——'

'Go on,' said Jack. 'Out with it.'

'Well, then, I want to ask Rose to be my wife, if you've no objection.'

'Oh, that's all!' said Jack.

'All!' said Lord Mayfield. 'Good gracious, Jack, how can you take it like that?

'Don't see much difficulty in taking that,' said Jack. 'It

will be a great honour for Rose to be Lady Mayfield. She'll like it, I have no doubt. To give you my candid opinion, Mayfield, I believe she's rather inclined to you herself.'

'Do you really think so? By Jove, Jack, I'll ask her,' said Lord Mayfield.

'Well, perhaps it might be as well to ask her,' said Jack. 'You see, the affair will concern her somewhat. I'd ask her, by all means.'

'Suppose she says No?' said Lord Mayfield.

'Never take No for an answer. Wait until she says Yes.'

'How would you like it, Jack?'

'My dear Mayfield, nothing would give me greater pleasure, for I am sure you would make my little sister happy.'

'I have but a second-hand sort of love to offer her,' said Lord Mayfield. 'I must tell her all about poor Daisy, Jack. She must know what I am before she gives her answer.'

'Yes, I should tell her all,' said Jack, 'and I'm not sure it would not be the best way to win her.'

'I must ask the Squire. Will he consent, do you think?'

'Try him,' said Jack; 'but don't startle him.'

Lord Mayfield did 'try' the Squire, and he got his consent, although he said Rose was perfectly free to follow the dictates of her own heart in the matter.

Edith Kingdon and Rose were chatting in the garden when Lord Mayfield and Jack came up to them, and after a few moments' conversation Edith and her lover walked away together.

'Oh, Lord Mayfield, they have left us,' said Rose. 'Hadn't we better go after them?'

'Miss Drayton, don't go, I wish to speak to you,' said Lord Mayfield.

Rose Drayton's heart gave a big jump. She felt that a crisis was at hand, and she could not escape it, did she wish to do so. She sat down near Lord Mayfield, and thought how handsome he looked.

'Miss Drayton, I have a story to tell you,' he said. 'It may interest you, and it may not. It is a sad story, and it concerns myself. Will you hear it?'

'If you wish me to, I shall be pleased to hear it,' she said.

'Probably your brother has told you how we met in Australia,' said Lord Mayfield.

'He has,' said Rose, 'and he also said what a good friend you had been to him, for which I, as his sister, thank you.'

'He was a good friend to me,' said Lord Mayfield. 'Miss Drayton, I had sad trouble in Australia. I loved a fair and lovely woman. Oh, how I loved her! She was not in society; in fact, she had met with great wrongs and misfortunes, which made her the more dear to me. I married her, and never had husband a more fond and loving wife. We lived happily, too happily together, and there was hardly a cloud to mar the sunshine of our days. But the crash came at last. I had given a ball to celebrate Caloola's victory. It had been an immense success, and Lady Mayfield had eclipsed all present for beauty and grace. The guests had all departed, and your brother and his affianced wife, myself, and Lady Mayfield were enjoying a few moments' quiet on the veranda. It was a lovely moonlight night, and we were talking over the triumphs of the evening, little thinking of any danger lurking near us. The ladies were about to go inside, when my wife turned to wish us good-night. As she did so, she seemed to be transfixed with horror. I shall never forget that look upon her face. With a piercing cry she flung herself upon my breast, and at that moment a pistol was fired. The fatal bullet sped home, and my wife lay in my arms bathed in blood. Miss Drayton, I can never quite forget the fearful agony of that night. We laid her gently on the sofa, and I stood by and watched her life, the life she had lost to save mine—for the shot was intended for me—ebb slowly away. She died in an hour after the shot had been fired, died in all the glory of her triumph, and with the ball-dress she had worn still upon her. Oh, it was a fearful blow! I felt as if my life had gone out with hers. The bitterness has passed, but the sting remains.'

'How you must have suffered!' said Rose, with tears in her beautiful eyes. 'She was a noble woman and worthy of your love. But who was the man that fired the shot?'

'A villain that had tried to ruin us all; at one time your brother's trainer. He had been ruined by Caloola's victory, and that was his revenge.'

'How horrible! Was he caught?' said Rose.

'Yes; Smirk caught him, and the wretch was killed in attempting to escape.'

A short silence ensued. Presently Lord Mayfield said:

'Miss Drayton, do you think a man has any right to try to win another woman for his wife after such an occurrence as that I have related?'

'That is a difficult question, and one you should be able to answer better than I can, Lord Mayfield.'

'I have answered it, Miss Drayton. I have met a beautiful woman, a good, true, innocent woman, a woman I feel I could devote the remainder of my life to. She is all that a man could desire. Yet I feel I have no right to ask her to join her lot with mine. My heart is not quite free. It is still chained to the memory of my dead wife. Would it be wrong for me to ask another woman to be my wife under such circumstances, Miss Drayton?'

'Do you know her feelings towards yourself?' said Rose. She fancied she had made a mistake, and that she had only his confidence.

'No, I do not. But I have the consent of her family to ask her the question,' he said.

'Then I should ask her. But first of all I should tell her the story you have told me. If she really loves you, her heart will sympathize with you, and wish to soothe the troubles of your past life by making your future happy,' said Rose slowly.

'Then, Miss Drayton—Rose, dear Rose, you are the woman.'

She started and turned quite pale. She had betrayed herself. It was, she thought, hardly fair of him.

'Stop one moment, Rose,' he continued; 'I wished to know what you would think of me before I ventured to ask you to be my wife. Dearest, will you accept such love as I can offer you? Will you be that woman to soothe the troubles of my past life and make my future happy? Tell me, Rose. Will you be my wife, dearest?'

Rose hesitated for a moment, then she raised her eyes with a loving look. He came nearer to her. He put his arm around her waist, and her fair head sank upon his shoulder.

'Rose, you will be my wife?' he said passionately.

'Yes,' she murmured, and he stooped and kissed her fondly.

'I will try to make you happy,' she said. 'But I will not

try to make you forget that noble woman who gave her life for yours, and saved you for me.'

'God bless you, Rose; you are an angel!' he said.

'Not quite, sir,' she said. 'I'm anything but an angel sometimes, I can tell you.'

And so it was all settled, and the Squire seemed delighted with the prospect of Rose becoming Lady Mayfield.

'Gad, Mayfield,' he said, 'I must congratulate you. She's a dear, good girl. Be sure to take care of her.'

'I will, Squire. She shall be happy if I can make her so,' said Lord Mayfield.

'Brothers now, eh, Mayfield?' said Jack.

'For ever, I hope,' said Lord Mayfield.

'I'm afraid Mohican's Derby, if it comes off, combined with a double wedding, will be almost too much for me,' said the Squire.

CHAPTER XL.

EPSOM DOWNS.

MOHICAN'S preparation for the Derby had been one of Ike Thurton's best efforts, and the week before the race, when he was despatched to Epsom, he looked fit as hands could make him. There was a good deal of anxiety on the part of the public to have a look at the 'dark horse' that had not yet run a race, and had been trained in private. There were three first-class performers in the race, in Welbeck, Meltonian, and Belvoir; and even money had been laid on the three to win many thousands. Kingdon had made good use of his time since he left Drayton and took up his abode at Anderton's Hotel. He had been introduced to all the best men on the turf, and his banker's account being undeniably substantial, he had no difficulty in opening a big book on the Derby. He had received plenty of patronage, and never tired laying the short odds against the three favourites. The fact of the matter was, Kingdon had determined to make a £10,000 book for Mohican, or, in other words, to 'save' that horse to run for him. He was well aware that Mohican was considered to have a chance second to none by those most intimately connected with him. Smirk was dining at Anderton's with Kingdon one

evening when the latter asked him whether he had backed anything for the Derby. Smirk replied in the negative, and said he did not care about betting at all. After a great deal of persuasion, however, he gave Kingdon a £10 note to invest on Mohican, and the bookmaker promised him he should have £100 if the horse won.

'I've serious thoughts of giving up the detective business,' said Smirk. 'I've a nice little income, and I'm about tired of the life.'

'Mean to settle down as a well-to-do farmer, eh, Smirk?' said Kingdon.

'Not exactly. But Squire Drayton promised I should have a try at the Meadow Farm, if I liked, as it will be free about midsummer. I think I'll take it.'

'You could not do better,' said Kingdon. And Smirk thought it would be decidedly pleasant to settle down after the exciting life he had lived.

When Mohican arrived at his Epsom quarters with Ike, Wells, and Willie, Kingdon went down to have a good look at him. He was very pleased with the horse, and so confident was Ike that he could win that Kingdon felt quite safe in laying the favourites freely. And that night at Tattersall's he peppered them in such a way that he fairly astonished the room.

'That fellow Kingdon must have something up his sleeve,' was the general opinion; and then people commenced to think; and knowing he was very intimate with Squire Drayton, fancied it must be Mohican he was going for. But not a word could they get out of him, and he declined to be drawn on the subject.

For all that, a rumour got about that Mohican was a good thing, and the horse's price shortened, until at one time he touched five to one, and threatened to become a good second favourite.

The Saturday before the Derby was selected for Mohican's final gallop. Squire Drayton, Lord Mayfield, and Kingdon were to witness it, and see how the horse shaped over the Epsom gradients. It was a beautiful bright June morning, and the turf was springy and covered with dew as the small party made their way on to the Downs.

Ike was already there with Mohican and a couple of good safe trial horses. Wells had the mount, and if the colt

came out of the ordeal well it was felt his chance was a great one. There were plenty of early morning touts about as usual, and the result of the trial would be all over the United Kingdom a few hours after it was run.

'Don't matter much who knows,' said the Squire. 'We've got all the money on that we want; thanks to you, Kingdon. The average price, ten to one, is quite good enough for me.'

There is no need to give the details of the trial; it suffices to say that Mohican did all that was asked of him, and the way Wells rode round the Corner even pleased the Squire.

That night Mohican was installed second favourite, and he stood a good chance of ousting Welbeck from his position.

At last the day arrived. Epsom Downs on Derby Day is one of the sights of the world. It is a very different spectacle to Flemington on Cup Day; and any unbiased observer will acknowledge that, so far as the arrangements are concerned, the Melbourne course beats Epsom in a canter. The crowd, however, on the Downs is a sight that can be seen nowhere else. It is not an edifying sight, by any means, although everyone appears to thoroughly enjoy it. All sorts and conditions of men are present, and it would be a difficult matter to enumerate the varieties. Epsom course is not by any means good. Many people would call it very bad. There can be no gainsaying the fact that the Derby is the great race of the world, although the stakes may not be so large as in some other races. The honour of owning a Derby winner was Squire Drayton's height of ambition. For twenty years he had tried hard to win the coveted prize; and on three occasions it had just been within his grasp. Naturally he was exceedingly anxious Mohican should win.

The general opinion appeared to be that the Squire had made a mistake in putting Wells up, and the odds against the horse expanded a shade in the ring before the race.

A small party had assembled at Drayton and come up to town with the Squire to see the great event. Edith Kingdon and Rose Drayton were naturally anxious to be present, and the former felt she could really enjoy it, as there was no great stake to risk, as in the case of Caloola's Cup. Rose Drayton had become a personage of considerable

importance in London society, since her engagement to the wealthy Lord Mayfield had been announced in the *Morning Post*. It is surprising what a difference the chance of a title makes. Miss Drayton was all very well as the daughter of a rich country Squire, but as the affianced of Lord Mayfield, she was courted and flattered, and invited everywhere. Lord Mayfield was a most attentive lover. He was not madly in love with Rose, but he had a great respect and admiration for her beauty and nobleness of character, and he felt that in time she would become very, very dear to him. As for Jack Drayton, he was head over ears in love with Edith, and his anxiety to have the wedding at an early date was somewhat ludicrous.

They were a merry party at Epsom on this beautiful June Derby Day. Their box was in a fine position on the stand, not far distant from that of the owner of the favourite, Welbeck, the famous Duke of ——, who was introduced to them by Lord Mayfield.

'I have an idea, Miss Drayton, that the Squire will beat me tod-ay,' he said. 'I must be contented, for I have won ten Derbies, and I shall not begrudge him the victory if Mohican wins.'

'Thanks, your grace, for your good wishes,' said Rose.

The field for the Derby was not large, but quality was well represented. Fourteen numbers were hoisted, and Edith, as she glanced at the card, saw that Mohican's number was 10.

'Oh, Jack, what a curious coincidence! Do tell the Squire. I'm sure Mohican will win now. Isn't it strange?'

'What important discovery have you made, Edith?' said Jack, laughing. 'You seem quite excited about it.'

'Have you not noticed it?' she said. Come, Lord Mayfield, glance at your card and tell me what my coincidence is.'

'Can't discover it, Miss Kingdon,' said Lord Mayfield.

'It's the numbers. Caloola's number was 10 on the Melbourne Cup card, and so is Mohican's,' she said.

'So it is, by Jove!' said Jack. 'That's a good omen, at all events. I'll tell the Squire. How on earth did you recollect that, Edith?'

'Shall I ever forget waiting until No. 10 was hoisted at Flemington?' she said. 'Never, Jack, as long as I live. Fancy, if that 10 had gone up second!'

'It was a near go,' said Jack. 'I hope this will not be quite so close.'

The betting in the ring at Epsom before the race for the Derby is something to be remembered. The roar of the bookmakers' voices, the babel of sounds all over the course, sound like the rumbling of thunder. As the horses come out of the bird-cage on to the course they are eagerly scanned. Welbeck, the favourite, makes his appearance with the celebrated jockey Poole on his back. Belvoir has the assistance of Swallow, and Meltonian, Potts. An outsider, named Farewell, with the crack light-weight, F. Garrett, in the saddle, has several followers. Mohican came on to the course last, and Wells sat the horse like the great jockey he was. He felt that much depended upon him in this race. He knew the English jockeys were rather inclined to chaff him, but Wells could stand a fair amount of that, and return it with stinging effect. The preliminary canter was over, and the horses had filed down to the starting-post in the dip on the far side of the hill.

'I'll lead these fellows a bit of a dance,' thought Wells. 'They never ride a race from start to finish here, but I'm going to have a try. I'll give them a bit of the Australian dodge. I wonder whether they'll follow me if I go off from the jump.'

Mohican was slightly restless at the post, and lashed out once or twice.

'Look out there,' said Swallow, the rider of Belvoir. Can't you ride a bit?'

'You'll see presently,' said Wells quietly. 'At all events I'm not much afraid of you. Why, you aren't a man at all. More like a native bear than anything.'

'Give it the cheeky beggar, Australia!' said Garrett.

'Get back there!' shouted the starter, as Belvoir came cantering to the front.

A false start, and Belvoir gallops up to the top of the hill.

'Can't you hold a horse yet,' said Wells, and Swallow ground his teeth with rage.

At last they're off, and the roar from the crowd proclaims the fact.

'Great Scott! what the deuce is Wells up to?' said the Squire. 'The fellow's mad. Why, he's actually making the

pace, and going at a great rate too. He's lengths ahead of the field.'

Jack smiled, as he said, 'A bit of Australian horsemanship, father. They run the races from the jump there.'

'He's bound to lose,' groaned the Squire. 'No horse can last at that rate.'

As they dipped behind the bushes Mohican was still in front; but it was quite evident the other jockeys thought it was about time they got a shade nearer to him, and as they came in sight again, Welbeck and Farewell were following hard after the leader.

'Bravo, Wells! He's racing for the Corner,' said Jack excitedly.

'So he is,' said the Squire. 'If Mohican can last they'll never catch him.'

Tattenham Corner — how fatal has this spot been to many a Derby horse! Round the sharp curve swept Mohican, with Wells holding him hard. Down the dip he came with tremendous strides; but Welbeck was not done with yet, and had fairly raced up to Mohican's girths. The outsider was also full of running, and Meltonian was dangerous. Belvoir was beaten, and fell back. The pace had been fast, much faster than the race is usually run at.

And now the struggle commenced in earnest, as they raced up the slight pinch before the finish.

Mohican ran true as steel, and Wells had not called upon him yet. The Squire became excited and cheered lustily.

'Mohican wins!' yelled the crowd.

The race was not over yet. Farewell came with a great rush, and got level with the leaders. It was a fine race.

Wells felt Mohican was not done, and he never raised his whip or used his spurs.

Poole was hard at work on the favourite, and Wells saw he had him beaten.

Garrett's rush on Farewell, however, was well timed, but it finished the horse before the judge's box was reached.

Wells just shook up Mohican, and the gallant son of Hermit responded, and passed the post amidst the cheers of the vast crowd a clear length in front of Farewell, with the favourite third. Number 10 was quickly hoisted, and ringing cheers greeted it, for the Squire was very popular. As he led the winner in to weigh, he felt prouder than ever

he had done in his life, and congratulations were heaped upon him from all sides. It was acknowledged that Wells had ridden a grand race, and the jockey felt he had somewhat recompensed himself for losing the mount on Caloola.

There were great rejoicings amongst the Drayton party that night, and the Squire's Derby dinner was one to be remembered.

As for Ike, he was delighted at his success.

Mohican was none the worse for his race, and when safely in his box at Drayton again he was quite at ease, as though winning the Derby was the easiest thing in the world.

When the news reached the village of Drayton the church-bells were actually set ringing, much to the disgust of some exceedingly pious people, who, by the way, shortly afterwards decamped, leaving their debts unsettled. All Drayton was frantic with joy. From the humblest boy in the Hall stables to Zedekiah Barnes, the landlord of the Drayton Arms, they all had their 'bit on' Mohican. It was also rumoured that the parson had invested a month's stipend on the result, and that the parish clerk the Sunday before the Derby had suggested to his pastor that it might be just as well to offer up a special prayer for the Squire's victory over all his enemies.

At all events, it is a well-known fact that honest Bill Buckle, the head bellringer and village barber, had vowed to shave the parishioners free for a week if Mohican won, and lather the parson's chin for nothing all the year round. Some uncharitable people said this was the cause of the church-bells being rung.

At the Drayton Arms, the night the news was received that Mohican had won, the snug bar-parlour was filled with villagers. Host Barnes had tapped a barrel of double stingo for the occasion, and declined to accept payment for the genuine home-brewed from his regular customers.

The Squire's health was drunk; Mohican's health was drunk; and then Ike, Wells, Master Jack, Lord Mayfield, and the ladies were toasted. There were so many toasts that the barrel got lower and lower, and the spirits of the company rose higher and higher.

'This is a glorious victory, said Barnes. 'My friends, we must have one toast more.'

'Gi'e it us, Zed; gi'e it us!' shouted a dozen voices.

'It's a special toast,' said Barnes solemnly.

'Out with it, Zed.'

'Here's to the two bonny brides, and may they live long and be blessed in happiness and good luck!' said Zed.

'Hurrah! hurrah! Bravo, Zed! The two bonny brides, and God bless 'em!'

Old Jabez Watson, the parish gravedigger, insisted on drinking the toast half a dozen times, and trusted that he should never have the pleasure of attending to either of the 'bonny brides.' He was ignominiously hustled out of the room after the last remark.

Then, when the Squire returned there was a great feast, and a huge canvas tent was erected in the park, and all the villagers came and partook of the good cheer.

And what a tumult of applause there was as Ike and Wells led Mohican and Caloola out to be admired by the company! At the ball at night old Zed Barnes danced till he was stiff as a crutch, so he said, and a right merry time they all had of it. The Squire made a great speech, which could hardly be heard for cheering, and Master Jack gave them a little of his Australian experiences.

Mohican's Derby was a great event in the village, and was the chief topic of conversation at the Drayton Arms for months afterwards.

CHAPTER XLI.

MARRIAGE BELLS.

THE story is drawing to a close, the tale will soon be told. The characters with whom we have become familiar will have played their parts, and must make way for new faces, new scenes, and other events. They have gone with the tide through a variety of exciting situations, and some have done well and others ill.

I am a firm believer in the ultimate triumph of virtue over vice in all phases of life. At times the wicked prosper and the good appear deserted; but it generally comes right in the end, and I am not bold enough to strike out a new line in this story. The Squire's triumph having been com-

pleted by the victory of Mohican in the Derby, he seemed to settle down again to the ordinary routine of his country life. He spent many hours watching the noble horse that had accomplished all he desired on the turf.

One morning, about three months after the events related in the last chapter, he was sitting in his room, when his son and Lord Mayfield entered. The Squire at once saw there was something in the air, and he fancied what it was.

'You two boys look like a pair of culprits,' he said. 'What is the deputation for?'

'The fact is, father, we have determined to get married this month, and we want your consent. Lord Mayfield is anxious to have Rose with him as soon as possible, and as Mr. Kingdon returns to Australia shortly, I think it would be better to marry Edith before he leaves us,' said Jack.

'Young blood,' said the Squire. 'I suppose you must have your way, and you both appear to be in a great hurry to put on the matrimonial bonds. But what do the ladies say?'

'They have consented,' said Jack, 'and we're to be married together in old Drayton Church, and we're not going to have much fuss about it, are we, Mayfield?'

'No; I am very much opposed to a stylish wedding. Let the Squire arrange matters for us. What do you think, sir?' said Lord Mayfield.

'I am very glad you have decided to be married at Drayton. It will be far better, and more preferable to me,' said the Squire.

And so it was all settled, and the day fixed and the invitations issued.

Although the weddings were to be quiet, Squire Drayton had determined there should be great rejoicings in the village, and at the Hall a ball was to be given, and also one in the servants' hall during the week.

At last the eventful morning arrived. The sun shone bright, and the sky was blue and clear as in sunny Australia. Very few friends had been invited, and those only on the most intimate terms with the family. Several of Lord Mayfield's relatives were present, and although at first opposed to the match with Rose Drayton, they had to confess that she was a very charming girl, and an eligible *partie*. On arriving at the church it was found that the enthusiastic villagers had raised a triumphal arch over the pathway, and

the walk was literally strewn with flowers, while on either side stood in line the school children of the village, all dressed in their best, and making a charming and picturesque group.

Jack Drayton felt proud as he met his bride at the church-porch. Edith Kingdon looked lovely, and the slight flush upon her cheek only added to the charm. Kingdon felt supremely proud, and Smirk, as he eyed the group over, thought single blessedness after all might be a bit of a curse.

Rose Drayton was the pet of the village, and the fact that she was about to become Lady Mayfield enhanced the attraction considerably. The grand old village church had seldom held such a gay throng, and all the faces were happy and smiling.

The marriage ceremony was soon over, the names signed, and Rose Drayton and Edith Kingdon were no more. Henceforth they would be Lady Mayfield and Mrs. John Drayton.

As they left the church cheer after cheer was raised, and showers of rice were hurled after the departing carriages.

'Mine at last,' said Jack, as he took Edith's hand. 'We have had some severe trials, Edith, and, thank God, we have come safely through them. I hope you will never regret the step you have taken. I have torn you from your sunny home and the land of your birth, but I will try and make you forget all in the future happiness which is before us.'

'You love me, Jack, and that is enough,' she said, as she nestled close to his side; 'I have found a new home, and shall begin a new life. I thought as I saw all those children at church how much good I could do in the village. I will help the old people, and be kind to the sick. Oh, Jack, I do so want to be good to someone. I feel I have led an idle, useless life.'

'You have not, Edith. Your life has saved me perhaps from ruin. It was the thought of you that often kept me straight in Australia. But for you I might have been a wild, careless gambler. You shall do what you please in the village, Edith, and when I am master of Drayton, which I hope will not be for years to come, you shall manage just as you like. But here we are at the Hall.'

A wedding breakfast may be delightful to some people, but it is questionable whether it was to the parties most nearly concerned. It was a good old-fashioned wedding breakfast at Drayton Hall. The guests were all enjoying themselves immensely. The Squire had been congratulated on gaining a fresh son and daughter in the place of those he had lost.

Merry speeches were made, and the time passed quickly away until the hour for departure came.

Jack and his wife were going to Scotland for their honeymoon, and Lord Mayfield took Rose to his estate in Devonshire. The Squire felt lonely when they had gone, and he counted the days until his son should return. He had persuaded Kingdon to remain with him, and he consented to do so. It was Kingdon's determination to return to Australia for a time, and then eventually to come back to England and settle down.

Smirk had remained at the Hall for a few days, and he had made good use of his time. He had been down to the village and gossipped with the landlord of the Drayton Arms, who had chaffed him unmercifully about not getting married. Smirk felt that he could not do better if he could find a suitable wife, and he determined to settle down in the county as speedily as possible. He had a serious conversation with Ike upon this important subject, and the old stud-groom advised him to look well before he took the matrimonial leap.

'You see,' said Ike, 'it's easy enough to get in training for the Stakes and pull 'em off, but you don't get into form again in a hurry. I shall never get married, Smirk, but I'll make you a handsome present when you do.'

'You're a brick, Thurton,' said Smirk. 'I've taken a particular fancy to Lady Mayfield's maid, but she won't look at me,' he said dejectedly.

'Won't look at you!' said Ike; 'that's nonsense. It's my private opinion she's had her eye on you ever since you first came here. She's a decent lass, too. But she'll be boss, Smirk; you mind if she ain't.'

Now, Letitia Barcom, who had been Rose Drayton's maid for three years, was a pretty, saucy damsel of some twenty-three years of age. She had an idea that Smirk admired her, and therefore she gave him several severe re-

buffs, and treated him with supreme contempt. Smirk felt hurt, and, what's more, he showed it. This made Letitia more flighty, and she even went so far as to get up a slight flirtation with Wells, much to Smirk's discomfiture.

When Jack and his wife returned to Drayton they soon discovered that Smirk was staying at the Drayton Arms, and Ike told Master Jack how the land lay.

'It would be just the thing for Smirk, Edith,' he said to his wife. 'He wants to settle down, and she will make him a good wife. Write to Rose and tell her all about it, and tell her to send Letitia to Drayton; that is, if the girl likes the idea.'

This was done, and one morning Letitia arrived at the Hall. Edith had a chat with her, and found that Letitia was not at all inclined to regard Smirk as an ineligible match.

The opportunity soon arrived for Smirk to try his chance. He met the fair maiden of his choice sitting under a large oak-tree in the park. For the first time in his life Smirk felt afraid. Why, he could not possibly tell. Perhaps it was the glance Letitia gave him from her bright, merry eyes. She looked a pretty picture seated under the big oak-tree. Smirk felt nervous, but he raised his hat and said:

'Good-morning, Miss Barcom. How did you enjoy your trip in Devonshire?'

'Pretty well, thank you, Mr. Smirk. But newly-married couples are awfully slow. So wrapped up in each other that they can think of no one else.'

'It must be very nice,' said Smirk.

'What must be very nice?' she said.

'To be wrapped up in one another,' said Smirk, with an amorous look.

'Don't talk nonsense, Mr. Smirk. I'm surprised at a man of your age and experience not knowing better,' she said.

This was a staggerer for Smirk—a man of his age! What did she mean? Did she think that he was old enough to be her father? The remark nettled him.

'Look here, Miss Barcom,' he said, 'I'm not particularly old. Dash it all, I'm not more than thirty-five.'

'Thirty-five!' she cried, holding up her hands in horror. 'What a great age, Mr. Smirk! But you don't look it,' she said, with a sly glance that nearly upset Smirk's equilibrium.

'One or two more piercers like that,' he told Ike afterwards, 'and he felt that he must declare himself vanquished.' Somehow or other Smirk found himself seated on the ground by the side of Letitia, at the foot of the old oak. Then, by a strange coincidence, he found his arm round her slender waist. Then he made the important discovery that he was squeezing her, and suddenly he saw her pretty face in close proximity to his own.

Then——. Smirk felt as though he felt a taste of unutterable bliss. He saw two cherry lips pouting, and two twinkling eyes looking longingly at him. He saw a pretty upturned face, and by some unaccountable force of attraction Smirk's lips met Letitia's with a delicious smack. The first taste was so nice Smirk repeated the experiment. 'I don't know how I did it, but I did it,' he said afterwards.

The next minute he had Letitia in his arms, and that fair damsel did not resist. When they once more got up from the root of the old oak Miss Letitia Barcom had promised to become Mrs. Christopher Talbot Smirk.

'He took me so sudden I could not resist him,' she explained to Edith. 'He's a masterful kind of a man, but he's not going to have it all his own way.'

From which it will be surmised that Smirk had a lively time before him.

When Smirk got married he settled down into a quiet country life, and was happy with Letitia.

'Well, Smirk,' said Jack, as he called at the house one fine morning, 'how does married life suit you?'

'Splendid,' said Smirk. 'I'd have got spliced long before if I'd known what I do now.'

'You're not a woman-hater now?' said Jack.

'Hush, here's the wife,' said Smirk.

Jack smiled as he said, 'Mrs. Smirk, I must congratulate you. Mr. Smirk has improved very much. Do you know, when he was in Australia he used to profess a profound contempt for your sex.'

'Did he?' said Mrs. Smirk, with a toss of her pretty head. 'For his own peace he'd better not do it now, or I'll assert my authority.'

'Don't be hard on him,' said Jack, with a laugh. 'He's all right when you manage him properly.'

'I can manage him,' she said archly. 'How is Mrs. Drayton?'

'Moderately well,' said Jack. 'An interesting event is expected to happen shortly.'

Letitia blushed, and Smirk laughed as he said:

'You're before us, any way, Mr. Drayton.'

Letitia gave him a sound box on the ear and vanished into the house.

'She's a good little thing,' said Smirk; 'but, by Jove! she can twist me round her finger. I believe I'm desperately in love.'

'Glad to hear it, Smirk. Come up to the Hall whenever you like. You know we are always glad to see you.'

'Thank you, Mr. Drayton,' said Smirk; 'I'll come up and have a chat with the Squire to-morrow.'

Jack rode away. He looked a fine, manly fellow mounted on his bay horse. The old Squire was ageing daily, and his son had more responsibility cast upon him. But Jack Drayton liked a county life, and he loved to ride about the estate seeing what he could do to assist and help the tenantry.

'He'll make as good a master as the Squire,' was the general opinion, and there was very little doubt of its being true.

Edith Drayton was very happy. She was idolized by the villagers, and she was always out on some errand of mercy or help. She was fondly attached to her husband, and a more loving couple did not exist. She was courted and made much of by the best people in the county, and had settled down into her new life contentedly. She often had a chat over old times with her husband, and the memory of Caloola's Cup always came vividly back to her when she saw the gallant horse taking his morning exercise accompanied by faithful Ike Thurton.

Wells had remained at Drayton, and was now the mainstay of Ike, and assisted him in the management of the stud and occasionally rode a horse to victory in the scarlet jacket. Willie was in the seventh heaven of delight, and a better lad about the stables was never found. So time rolled on, and changes took place at Drayton, as they must inevitably do as we get older and nearer the end of our journey.

CHAPTER XLII.

AT EVENTIDE.

A BRIGHT sunny July morning. Such a morning as makes a man thank God that he is alive and can enjoy the beauties of nature. On these Derbyshire hills around Drayton Hall there was a quiet, calm, peaceful serenity that would have charmed even a Ruskin. No sound of the distant railway permeated the secluded valley; the iron horse had as yet not forced its way through its hills and dales. Early morning, too. Six o'clock, and the birds rustling and twittering amidst the ivy leaves that clung with loving fondness to the old weather-beaten walls of Drayton Hall. How snug the old place looked in that charming valley of the Dove! The murmur of the stream could be faintly heard as it wended its way, twisting, twirling in a thousand fantastic shapes. The pure clear water sparkled in the light of the risen sun as it splashed over a bed of many-coloured pebbles and stones, passing on through bright green pastures, its banks covered with wild foxgloves, forget-me-nots by the thousand, and a score of varieties of those beautiful wild-flowers known only to England's rural haunts. At the back of the Hall the crows were cawing in the old rookery, and as the smoke curled up from the chimneys it twisted upwards in a hundred shapes, until lost to view in the clear blue atmosphere above. As John Drayton looked down that beautiful valley, across the wide expanse of the park, dotted with deer and cattle, he felt supremely happy.

He did not look much older. There was a slight suspicion of gray in the hair, and the face had changed. The same kind, but firm, man was, however, there. He was master of Drayton now. The good old Squire had gone peacefully to his last resting-place. He died without pain—sank into his last long sleep surrounded by his family. No more loving hand had ministered to his wants than that of Edith Drayton. How the old Squire had loved her! She had taken the place of Rose, his daughter, who was lost almost in the fashionable world of London. They buried him with his ancestors. He sleeps in the old church where his son married his lovely bride. He is not forgotten, and never will be whilst old Drayton Hall stands.

Drayton's thoughts went back over a vista of years as he stood on the terrace this grand July morning. It seemed like a dream, that Australian experience. And yet it was very real, Calcola's victory. He fancied he could again hear the shouts of the frantic crowd at Flemington: 'Caloola wins!' Memories of the past! who has not many memories of the past? As we go with the tide we carry along with us good and bad deeds, actions we love to recall, incidents we desire to forget.

Breakfast at Drayton Hall meant doing the thing in the real old English style—the table laden with good, sound, wholesome fare. Let us give a glance at that table.

At the head sits John Drayton. We know him well. A handsome lady presides over the tea and coffee department—a fine woman, a magnificent woman, the country people call her. More matured and matronly than when we saw her last. The same beautiful face and soft kind eyes. The belle of the county even now. How well her position becomes her! It is the Squire's wife. It is Edith Kingdon that was, the Sydney leviathan's daughter. It does one good to watch her, she looks so perfectly happy. And who is that well-built, athletic-looking man, with the iron-gray hair and keen merry eyes? Not thoroughbred quite, but a man who has made himself what he is, a man whose word is his bond, whose name is a synonymous term for honesty? He is a late arrival from Australia; and our old friend Will Kingdon, of course, the Sydney leviathan and the father of the bonniest lass in all the shire. He looks hale and hearty, He's made a fortune, and spends his time oscillating between Australia and England and *vice-versâ*. He has got so used to it that when Kingdon says he is going for a change of air it invariably means a voyage to Sydney.

Breakfast is over. A group of yearlings are playing in a paddock, and leaning over the gate looking at them are John Drayton and Lord Mayfield, Will Kingdon and old Ike Thurton. He looks venerable, but he's full of life yet, and is honoured at Drayton.

'Beautiful youngster!' said Lord Mayfield.

'That one is by Caloola, my lord,' said Ike, pointing to a fine chestnut, that looked a king amidst his fellows.

'By Caloola, is he? Well, he does the Australian credit. What's his figure, Drayton?'

'Two thousand,' said Jack.

'I'll have him. He's worth more, Jack. 'Pon my word he is. You'll be sorry to lose him, shan't you, Ike?'

'I shall, my lord. He's the pick of our lot.'

'It's wonderful what great stock Mohican and Caloola get!' said Drayton. 'They are full of life and fire. Come and have a look at Caloola. Where is he, Ike?'

'In his paddock this morning. Such a nice warm day as this he must have a bit of a caper round.'

A large, airy loose-box, situated at one corner of an extensive paddock. A beautiful chestnut horse in the far corner raises his head as they approach. With a leisurely stride he comes towards them. Right up to Drayton he goes, and rubs his head against his shoulder.

'Dear old boy!' said Jack. 'You look well this morning. Isn't he a grand old fellow, Mayfield?'

'He is,' said Lord Mayfield, as he patted the arched neck.

Another friend who has passed through some exciting scenes with us: Caloola, the hero of the sensational Melbourne Derby and Cup. Altered, of course, but still Caloola. A fine lord of the harem he looks. A noble animal—a credit to Chester, his sire. What a history attaches to this horse! Here he stands in his paddock, quiet and peaceful, his life one long luxury. But think how he has earned it! Remember the fearful struggles at Flemington, when he won for Drayton his wife, lost Lord Mayfield his wife, ruined 'Spider' Fletcher, and nearly broke the ring. History! There's a world of history in every great racehorse. Ask Henry Chaplin if there's not a world of history in Hermit, the sire of Mohican. Is there not a world of history in Eclipse, Blair Athol, Blue Gown, Bend Or, Galopin, Voltigeur, Gladiateur, Pretender, and Kingcraft? Ay, and going further back, in Whisker, Emilius, Priam, Bay Middleton, Cotherstone, Flying Dutchman, and many others? Caloola is making history, and has sired two Derby winners, a Leger and Oaks winner, and winners of many great races. He has a lovely home at Drayton. Often as old Ike Thurton looks at him he thinks of that great ride in the Melbourne Cup, and wonders how he did it.

Often, as Edith Drayton gives him some dainty morsel from her small white hand, she speaks loving words to him, and her eyes are dim with tears as she thinks of that great day

and the terrible tragedy that followed it. She feels a shudder of almost fear as she again fancies that awful brief space before the winning number is hoisted in the Cup. And Lord Mayfield—what does he think? As he looks at Caloola his face becomes grave, and there is a smothered sigh which sounds like 'Poor Daisy!'

We are drawing to a close. The tide has led us to a peaceful end. We have passed through exciting scenes and struggles. They are over. It is Eventide, and the sun sinks behind the Derbyshire hills. The moonlight gleams on the casements of old Drayton Hall. The stillness of night is round about. The nightingale's song is heard in the wood, and the corncrake's note sounds from the fields of yet growing grain. Sleep peacefully within those ancient walls. Dream on, and in the morning rise refreshed. Drayton, good-night. It is Eventide. May peace be within that old Hall for ever!

* * * * *

An Australian churchyard nook. A grave well tended. A monument in memory of the loved one sleeping below. No need to read the inscription. She sleeps alone, and yet not alone. Once a year that grave is strewn with the loveliest and choicest flowers. Every November, the week after the Flemington carnival, the grave attracts visitors. They look upon the picture, and think of the past. Forgotten? Never. Loving memories cause those flowers to be strewn over the tomb. She suffered, maybe sinned much, but in one heroic act atoned for all. Let her rest in peace! Daisy, you are not forgotten. The living still remember the dead. 'Tis night with you, 'tis Eventide with them.

THE END.

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